

Turf [I need a new title! suggestions?]

by MizC

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Summary: I've finally updated! This is the whole story updated...

hmm... there's a territory war going on in the city, and all sorts of stuff going on around it... (hey its a cool story. R&R please?)

Turf [I need a new title! suggestions?]

09.05.00

><br>"?" by Bry O'Callan

><br>Part 1:

><br>Shuffles knew that Spot was in Harlem long before she actually saw him. Her runners had brought her the news early that day, while Spot was still crossing Manhattan. Yet she was unprepared for when he showed up at the Lodging House completely unarmed. Even his trademark goldtipped cane was missing from his side.

>Shuffles couldn't help but comment on the missing weapons when he entered. "Well well... if it aint the mighty Spot Conlon. So fah from home, and unarmed? Youse got a death wish Fido?"<br>Spot's eyes flashed dangerously, but he kept his cool. Shuffles smirked, her green eyes lit with a hard gleam, and a touch of curiosity.

>"Youse haven't been ta Harlem in close ta a yeah Spot. Why do ya grace us with ya presence now?"<br>Spot crossed his arms. "Turf war," he said simply.

>Shuffles sat up in her chair, her feet hitting the ground hard. The deck of cards she had been shuffling dropped unnoticed to the counter. The other newsies in the lobby all looked up in surprise.

"'Scuse me Conlon? Wanna repeat dat?"<br>It was Spot's turn to smirk. "Ise said, turf war."

>Shuffles's eyes narrowed. "Youse aint gettin Harlem Spot."<br>Conlon waved his hand dismissively. "Keep it. Dis war aint between youse and I. 's between youse and Jacky-boy."

>"Me 'n Cowboy? We'se not fightin.. not since da strike."<br>Spot sighed. "Look Harlem's little. Youse aint got no power. You'se take over Manhattan, you'se be almost as powerful as Brooklyn."

>Shuffles fell back in her chair laughing. Spot looked at her through eyes of ice. "What?"<br>"Youse is tryin ta start a war 'tween Manhattan 'n Harlem... Conlon youse must be wantin ta git me newsies killed! We'se cant fight da Manhattan boys." Shuffles wasn't stupid. She knew her newsies were good... but Manhattan was second only to Brooklyn when it came to fighting.  
>"Me newsies 'll help ya."<br>The entire room went silent.

>Shuffles climbed to her feet slowly, her eyes locked calculatingly on Spot. She couldn't figure it out. Jack was Spot's best friend. Why would he turn on him? And why would he come to her? They hadn't spoken, except through brief messengers, in over a year. Neither had been in the others presence, (unless at a leaders meeting) in almost two. Not since... Shuffles quickly stopped her train of thought, and brought herself back to the present. Her expression changed to one of thoughtfulness. "What's in it fer youse?"<br>Spot shrugged. "Da satisfaction of helpin' out a fellow leadah... a few rumbles... undisputed claim of da bridge... ya know, lil' t'ings like dat."

>Shuffles wasn't fooled. She nodded slowly in understanding.<br>The Brooklyn Bridge had always been a sore point between Manhattan and Brooklyn. Both territories thought of the bridge as theirs, but neither officially claimed it.

>Shuffles shook her head. "Let me get dis straight. Youse want me ta send me newsies 'gainst Jack Kelly's newsies in Manhattan, da second best fighters in da whole state, just so youse can claim da Bridge? Youse got newsies. Fight 'em yahself."<br>Spot slammed his fist down on the table, making everyone in the room jump. One look from his ice cold eyes sent every newsie out of the room. Once he and Shuffles were alone, he met her gaze.

>"Youse dont git it!" He bit off through clenched teeth. His tight hold on his temper was straining. "Brooklyn and Manhattan fight, we'se end up gettin da whole damn city choosin sides. Even da guys from da fah side of Long Isle would join up. We'se too big, gots to many allies, ta start dis fight. Harlem and Manhattan fight, 's just a turf war. No one'll think twice 'bout it."<br>Shuffles was silent, studying the broken laces of her shoes. After a few moments she glanced up, pushing her blond hair out of her face. "Why me?"

>Spot looked at her in confusion. "Whatta ya mean?"<br>"Damnit Conlon don't play games wit me. You an' I havent spoken in person since Ise took ovah da leadahship heah. So why do ya come ta me now? Ye' got strongah allies on da uddahside of da bridge.

>Spot shrugged. "Yer turf is lil' Shuffles. Youse is always lookin for more territory, an' no one would question ya fightin' foh more. Plus Jacky-boy stole some of yah territory last month, didn't he? Youse is down ta barely twenty blocks now." <br>Shuffles nodded. Spot hesitated for a moment before continuing. "And cuz youse is Blink's sistah."

>Spot smirked when he saw Shuffles pale at his comment. "How de 'ell did youse find out?" she asked.<br>"'e told me. Youse and him ah a lot alike. I suspected so Ise asked 'im. He dont lie well."

>Shuffles nodded. "Yeah Ise know." She hardened. "So Blink's me bruddah. So what?"<br>Spot went to fiddle with the top of his cane, but remembered he had left it in Brooklyn. "Since youse has relations in Manhattan, da boys'll be less brutal. Blink wont let'em hoit youh newsies so bad."

>"Youse said youh newsies 'll 'elp mine. How?"<br>Spot shrugged. "Dey kin 'elp teach youh newsies ta fight wit weapons... plus some of 'em kin 'elp kick da Manhattan boys out."

>Shuffles picked up her discarded deck of cards and shuffled them absently. Not paying attention to her hands, she answered Spot. "If I sez dat Harlem 'll help youse git da bridge... what do we'se git?"<br>"As much of da Manhattan turf dat youse want, and kin hold."

Spot smirked; he knew she was close to agreeing.<br>"How do Ise know dat youse wont gouge us? Wont leave us in da lurch afta we'se declare war on Cowboy?"<br>"You dont. Youse just gonna hafta trust me."

>Shuffles laughed a little. "Trust youse.. ya right." She was silent for a moment. Spot couldn't read her expression. When she met his eyes, they were a clear blue, hiding every emotion. "You sweah on Chance's memory dat Brooklyn will stand 'hind Harlem in dis. And dat when we'se win, youse stop ya turf at da Bridge and leave me newsies alone."<br>Spot's emotional walls almost broke at the mention of his brother, and former leader of Brooklyn. But he met her gaze unflinchingly. "Ise sweah." They stood for a moment, gazes locked.

>Then Shuffles cleared her throat and the tension was broken. "Aight den. Harlem 'll fight dis war fer youse... wit your help." She spit in her palm and held it out to him. He returned the gesture, shaking hands with her firmly. "Den da turf war is on. Tamorrow I'll tell Cowboy."<br>~~~~~

>The sun rose brightly the next morning, flooding the Harlem Lodging House with its light. Shuffles walked through the bunkroom, knocking on headboards to wake up her newsies.<br>Harlem didn't have a caretaker for its Lodging House, not like Manhattan. Shuffles woke early each morning, as leader, so she could wake her newsies up in time to buy their papers. Today, however, she woke them earlier than usual.

>"Git up! C'mon Shadow, Ditz, Dice. Youse gotta git up. We'se goin inta Manhattan today 'member?"<br>The newsies grumbled as they climbed out of bed and dressed quickly. Shuffles glanced around then, satisfied that everyone was awake, headed down the stairs. Moments later her two seconds joined her on the steps.

>Flicks, a tall newsie with short brown hair and quick green eyes, stood against the door jam, lighting a cigarette. He exchanged glances with Shadow, a dark, black haired, brown eyed girl. Both were thinking the same thing. It was Shadow who raised the question.<br>"'ey Shuff? um.. well we'se was wonderin... why we'se workin wit Brooklyn? We'se may not be rivals, but we aint really allies eiddah. We ain't worked wit dem since Spot took ovah. Da guys a joik."

>Shuffles sighed, flipping her hair out of her face and leaning back on the steps. She absently toyed with a deck of cards as she gazed out at the street. "Yeah 'e is. And Ise dont trust 'em. But he's right.. Harlem's fallin' apa't. We'se so lil' now... twenty newsies in twenty blocks. We needs our streets back. We'se beat Manhattan, we'se got t'ree times da territory dat we'se got now."<br>Flicks shifted uncomfortably. "Yeah wells.. what if 'e toins on us? He 'n Jacky-boy have been friends fohevah... back when Cowboy lived in Brooklyn. If he's dis willin' ta toin on 'is best friend, jist foh da Bridge, 'magine whit he'd do ta us?"

>"Youse right Flicks.. I knows dat." Shuffles voice softened. "He swoah on Chance dat he wouldnt betray us."<br>Both Flicks and Shadow sensed the change in mood of their leader. They knew how important Chance had been to Shuffles. After Chance had died, she had never been the same. If Spot had sworn on the memory of Chance then they knew they could trust him, for now.

>The two seconds were saved from commenting by the arrival of the rest of the newsies. Laughing and joking, the youths bounded down the

stairs and into the streets of Harlem. All were silent though, when Shuffles stood. She glanced over the gathering.<br>"A'ight.. Shadow youse is comin wit me. We'll take Guy, Bolt, Thunder...and um... yeahs Flute youse kin come wit us. We'se is goin ta Manhattan. De rest of youse, buy youh papes and sell 'em like usual. Spread out, youse kin pass da bohDAH, but take someone wit youse. If youse see any of da boys from Manhattan, soak 'em. Dat it?"

>Flicks leaned over and whispered in her ear. Her eyes hardened. "Oh yeahs.. who use ta sell in dose blocks dat Cowboy stole last month?" A few newsies stepped forward. "Yeah okays... youse kin go back ta yer old sellin spot. Kick 'em out if der there.. take someone wit youse. Dat it now? Good.. go head out."<br>

>Shuffles and the newsies she had named at the Lodging House had just crossed the ManhattanHarlem border. As they had walked, Shuffles had grabbed one of her runners and sent him to Spot. When they crossed the border, the Harlem look out, Nail, had informed them that the Manhattan look outs weren't at their posts yet.

>Shuffles had snickered at that. Most of her look outs and runners stayed at their posts all night, and were relieved every other day. Manhattan was the only turf that didn't keep look outs 247. It made it an easy territory to cross through.

>As they walked the six newsies joked around, despite the underlaying tension. Flute had pulled out her thin wooden instrument and was playing an Irish jig on it. Guy and Bolt were teasing Thunder and Shadow mercilessly, while the couple stubbornly ignored them. Shuffles was still playing absently with her deck of cards, not even aware of what she was doing.<br>They grew quiet as the World Circulation Center came into view. Shuffles glanced around, her keen eyes picking out her runner and two of Spot's newsies hiding in the shadows. They nodded at her slightly, before disappearing down an alley. She hid her relief as her newsies approached the gates.

>Shuffles pointedly ignored Jack and the rest of the Manhattan newsies once she entered the gates. Pushing past them, she cut off Blink and stepped to the front of the line. Winking at Oscar with a half smile, she dropped her coin on the counter. "Hundred papes."<br>Weasel raised an eyebrow but shrugged. Inwardly he smirked at the expression on Kid Blink's face. "Hundred papes fer Shuffles!"

>Oscar pushed past Morris to hand Shuffles her papers. "Haven't seen youse 'round lately Shuffles. How's Harlem?"<br>Shuffles could tell that she was pissing Blink off, who stood behind her, with a number of things. Talking to a Delancy, holding up the line, ignoring him.. the list went on. Ignoring her brother, who kept tapping her on the shoulder, she smiled at Oscar as she took her papers. "Its doin' good. We'se got a couple of new newsies 'round."

>Oscar grinned. "Maybes I'll come up ta see 'em. How's Flicks?"<br>"He's doin good... misses seenin' ya all da time." She shrugged Blink's hand off her shoulder. "Ise got papes ta sell so I'll see yas 'round, a'ight Oscash?"

>Oscar nodded to her as she stepped off the platform. "Yeah latah..."<br>Shuffles was stopped as she walked down the steps. Looking up she saw Jack, along with half of the Manhattan newsies behind him. Glancing over her shoulder, she felt rather than saw her newsies come up behind her in support. Raising an eyebrow, she smiled sweetly as she met Jack's gaze. "Mornin' Sullivan."

>Jack's eyes went hard and his face flushed with anger at Shuffles's use of his given name. "Dis is Manhattan territory Shuffles. What're youse doin' heah?"<br>Shuffles shrugged, still keeping up her innocent act. "Why, just getting a change of scenery Mister

Sullivan," she mocked in a fake southern accent. The Harlem newsies snickered.

>"Git out of me territory Shuffles." Jack warned.<br>Shuffles smirked, all pretenses aside. "No."

>A collective gasp of shock and confusion filled the center. The interaction between the two leaders was being watched by every newsie present. Even Morris was showing interest.<br>"Go back ta Harlem Shuffles." Jack glared at her. "Youse got no business heah."

>The Manhattan newsies shifted uneasily behind him. Shuffle's gaze swept them before she turned her attention back to Jack. She stepped closer to him, eye to eye. "Maybes I do. Give me newsies der spots back."<br>Jack looked confused. Shuffles sighed. "Is your train of t'ought still at da station? Look I'll 'splain it to yas, 'nd use lil' words for ya to undahstand. Youh boys took almost twelve blocks of me territory. Ise want it back, wit interest."

>Some of the Manhattan newsies backing Jack snickered. However one look from Shuffles shut them up. Jack shook his head. "No ways Shuffles. Dat's Manhattan territory now. Git used ta it."<br>Shuffles's blue eyes hardened to ice. Pulling her arm back, she backhanded Jack across the face. He fell back in shock. Her icy gaze swept the Manhattan newsies. "Harlem declares turf war on Manhattan! We'se takin' ouh territory back, plus youhs."

>She smirked coldly at Jack. "I suggest your boys git out of Manhattan 'fore Harlem kicks youse out. Go live in Joisey or sometin."<br>For some reason this enraged Jack to no end and he lunged at Shuffles. Kid Blink held him back though, with help from Much and Race. Blink looked up at his sister sadly.

>Shuffles could clearly read the hurt and betrayel in her brother's eyes, and in most of the other newsies, but she hardened her heart to it. "Come on Harlem, youse got yer papes?" <br>Getting an affirmative answer from the five newsies, she nodded. "Aight, go sell."

>The five Harlem newsies disappeared off, the crowd parting in front of them as they walked. Shuffles watched them go before turning back to Jack. Walking up to him, she patted his cheek. "If youse give me da territory now, den we'se let youse go."<br>Jack's reaction was to lunge for her again, his face red with suppressed rage.

> Shuffles sighed dramtically. "Oh wells.. faih warnin. Don worry Jacky-boy.. we'se wont hoit ya too bad."<br>With one last smirk for Jack, an almost sad glance for Blink and a blown kiss for Oscar, Shuffles left the World Circulation Center.

><br>Shuffles walked down the streets of Manhattan, calling out the headlines as she went. Her papers were going fast, already she had sold almost half. As she walked she couldn't help but notice the difference between Manhattan and Harlem. Though they were right next to each other, on the same island, the streets in Manhattan were nicer, more open and felt somewhat safer.

>She briefly wondered if that last thought was true, when she was grabbed from behind into an alley way. Quickly breaking free from her attacker, she spun around. She let out a deep breath when she saw who it was.<br>"Jesus Conlon! 're ye tryin ta give me a heart attack??"

>Spot smirked, lighting a cigarette. He exhaled slowly, before offering it to Shuffles. "'ey whatevah. I saw what ya did ta Jacky-boy. Youse got guts goil."<br>Shuffles glared at him. "Harlem's doin dis fer youse. Ise just playin da paht."

>Spot's eyes were cold, even as he smiled. "Yeah but tell me youse didn't get a kick outta knockin around Jacky-boy."<br>"I'd like ta knock youse around," she muttered under her breath.

>"What was dat?" Spot glared.<br>"Not'in'." She scowled as she took another drag on the cigerrete. "Aight, so da foist move was made. Now

what?"

>"Now we'se go ta Brooklyn. I knows Jack like da back of me cane. He'll be comin ta see me at da docks, askin feh help. Youse is gonna be dere already, but hiddin. Jacky boy don't need ta know dat youse got Brooklyn backin ya yet."<br>Shuffles hesitated. "Ah youse shoih dat Ise gotta be dere?"

>Spot raised an eyebrow at her hesitation. "Yeah Ise shoih. Why?"<br>Shuffles sighed. How would she explain that she didn't want to face the memories that Brooklyn held for her? "Nevahmind... Ise guess its not important."

>Spot shook his head. He knew Shuffles wasn't telling him something, and he had a feeling that he knew what it was. Mentally he shrugged. He couldn't do anything about it at the moment. "Well... a'ight. We'se goin' to da docks. Its where we'se normally stay," he explained. "We'se moved ouh Lodgin' House to dis warehouse by da rivah, so da docks is a good place ta meet."<br>Shuffles nodded her understanding. "How long will Ise gotta be dere? I mean... what 'bout me newsies? Der out sellin right now, but dey gonna run inta da Manhattan boys soon."

>"I already sent some of me boys ta Harlem. Dey'll be fine. An' youse only gotta stay till aftah Cowboy leaves, but uh..." he hesitated briefly. "Ise shoih dat da boys will like seein' ya again. So maybes youse should visit wit' dem."<br>Shuffles nodded again, recognizing Spot's invitation but neither accepting or refusing it. Without another word, the two leaders headed towards the Brooklyn docks. With Spot's help, Shuffles sold all of her papers before they arrived. As they walked through the city's streets Shuffles kept her eyes on the ground, especially as they passed the old Lodging House.

>As they walked down the wooden dock, Shuffles greeted the few newsies that she recognized. Many of them she hadn't seen in years, and all greeted her with surprise and warmth. Shuffles climbed up on to one of the platforms at the end of the dock. She was surprised at the number of newsies that were around, considering the early hour. Some newsies were still out selling their papes, but a good number were relaxing on the docks. Spot settled himself farther up the docks from her and, after putting up his cane and slingshot, whistled a quick series of notes.<br>At once, three small newsies of about nine years old, came running. Despite their youth, they were battle hardened with eyes too old for their age. Two of them carried switch blades in their belts. Spot nodded to the one without a blade.

"Report Trackah."

>Tracker straightened up. "Not much goin on up by da Queens bohдах. Lucky showed up early 'bout the pokah game foh tomorra night, in da Bronx. 'e says its at 10 in BJ's casino."<br>Spot looked interested. He glanced up at Shuffles. "'ey your newsies like pokah?" She nodded an affirmative. "Come ta da game tomorra den. 's just Brooklyn, da Bronx and Queens."

>"Shoih." <br>Spot turned back to the three lookouts. "A'ight den. Trackah youse kin go. Switch Blade youse got any info foh me?"

>Switch and Blade, the two newsies with blades, were twins. Since they both carried identical switchblades, and were always together, they shared a name. <br>Switch started. "Well we'se was at da Bridge..."

>Blade continued. "cuz Kicks was at da eastahn bohдах..."<br>Switch again. "and Kelly showed up..."

>Blade, "wit Mush and Race..."<br>Switch, "and he says he's comin ta see ya..."

>Blade, "aftah he finishes sellin..."<br>Switch, "his papes and aftah he sees..."

>Blade, "his goilfriend. Wants ta talk..."<br>Switch, "'bout Harlem declarin war..."

>Blade, "on Manhattan."<br>Spot seemed to have followed the report, but Shuffles had gotten lost at about "Kelly". She wondered if the two twins always talked like that. It was no wonder they were practically treated as one person.

>Spot nodded. "Good woik boys. Ya sell papes yet today?"<br>Both shook their heads. Blade, "We'se was just relieved,"

>Switch, "from look out duty by.."<br>Blade, "Runnah a few minutes..."

>Switch, "ago."<br>Spot glanced around. "Flash! Is da centah still open?"

>A tough lookin newsie looked up from the pape he was readin. "Nah.. 's too late. Aftahnoon edition 's out wit'in da houah 'dough."<br>Spot nodded. "All 'ight den... Switch Blade, you'se is dasmissed."

>The two boys nodded to him before disappearing off. Spot glanced up at Shuffles from under the shadow of his hat. "Bettah git ready. Cowboy's gonna be eoily dis aftahnoon."<br>

>Shuffles sighed in boredom. She was sitting in the shadows, atop the platform at the end of the dock. A runner had approached Spot less than ten minutes before, saying that Cowboy was in Brooklyn and on his way. She wanted him to get there soon so she could get out of the city, away from the memories of Chance, and back to her own territory. <br>"Its 'is turf war... Ise still dont know why Ise is helpin da joik" Shuffles muttered out loud to herself.

>Flash, who was loungin on the dock below, heard her comment and snickered. He was an older newsie, and had been Chance's second before Chance had died. Climbing up on to the platform, he sat down across from her. "Yeah yas do"<br>Shuffles smiled sadly at him. He brought back memories that she still had trouble dealing with "'ey Flash... its been a really long time. And no Ise dont. Spot's an arrogahnt, self centahed lil' bastahd."

>Flash raised an eyebrow at her. "Youse said da same ting 'bout Chance when youse foist met 'im, if I recalls right."<br>Shuffles glared at him and he held up his hands. "'ey.. Ise dont mean nuttin by it. Jist makin an ob.. a obsa...w'at's da woid?"

>"A' obsahvation." Shuffles supplied dryly.<br>"yeah, dats it. Ise is just makin da obsahvation."

>Shuffles looked over at their subject of conversation. He was sitting a little ways down the pier, smoking a cigarette and reading a copy of the World. Ever so often he glanced up casually, waiting to see Jack in the distance but trying to look disinterested. Shuffles sighed, a little sadly.<br>"All Spot cahes about now is his self and his rep. He's gotten so cold... He's not da same person. He's not even doin dis ta help Harlem, 'es jist usin us ta git da Bridge."

>Flash met Shuffles's gaze steadily. "Wese all were affected by Chance's death." He ignored her wince, and continued. "Some of us dealt wit it bettah den oddahs. Spot grew cold yeah... an' he's a lot more self-centahed." Flash tilted his head slightly. "Youse grew cold too Shuffles. An' youse ran away."<br>Shuffles turned her head away. Flash sighed, seeing that she wasn't going to continue that conversation. He changed the subject. "An' as foh Spot usin' Harlem ta fight his battles wit Jack? Have you'se even t'ought 'bout why Spot asked youse ta 'elp him, and not Diamond or Scah? Midtown and da Bowery are closah to da Bridge den Harlem."

>Shuffles eyed Flash curiously, secretly grateful that he had changed the subject. "He said somet'in... 'bout no one t'inkin' twice about us fightin' foh more turf. An' everyone knows dat da boys in Midtown

an' da Bowery fight rough. Spot said dat he don't want no one getting' hoit."<br>Flash raised his eyebrow as he watched Shuffles. "Youse believe him? If dats his only reasonin', den why didn't he jist git da Village to fight Manhattan? Dey's closah to da bridge too..."

>Shuffles sighed. "Ise don't know, a'ight Flash? So why's don't ya tell me." She was tired, depressed and sick of playing games.<br>Flash's gaze caught Shuffles's. "Cuz 'e knows dat he kin trust youse Shuffles. You, not Harlem, but youse. An' he knows dat Harlem's in trouble. He watched you build Harlem up from nothin', and toin it into da territory dat it is now. Spot wasn't gonna watch Cowboy steal dat away from you." Flash's gaze faltered and he glanced away.

>Shuffles leaned back, startled. She was silent for a moment, before responding. "Ise didn't know dat he trusted me dat much. An'... well, Ise guess Ise gotta t'ank 'im foh lookin' out foh Harlem like dat. If Jack takes ovah ouh territory like he's been doin... me newsies wont have no place ta go. I'm surprised dat Spot t'ought about dat..."<br>Flash hesitated. "Der was annuda reason..."

>Shuffles sat up, hearing the hesitation in his voice. "Dere was? What was it?"<br>Flash's eyes flickered to hers, before he glanced away. He hesitated, opened his mouth to answer her and the closed it again. Shuffles's eyes narrowed in confusion and irritation.

>"What are youse hidin' from mes Flashpot?" <br>Flash squirmed at the use of his full newsie name. He sighed. "Fine. Youse might as well know... but Ise got dis feelin dat youse aint gonna like it. Spot wanted ta woik wit youse cuz he---"

>Spot's voice cut Flash off before he could finish his sentence. "'ey Jacky-boy. How's it rollin'?"<br>Flash looked relieved to have been interrupted. He quickly turned slightly, hiding Shuffles more fully from Jack's line of sight. Shuffles, more disappointed then she would have cared to admit that the conversation had been interrupted, shrank farther back into the shadows of the platform.

>Jack exchanged a spit-shake with Spot. Spot noted mentally that Jack looked worn. He smirked when he noticed the slight discoloration on Jack's cheek. <br>Jack shrugged in response to Spot's inquiry. "'Eh, its rollin al'ight Ise guess."

>"How's tings wit Sarah?" Spot asked.<br>Jack shook his head. "Ise dunno... she's distant? Not talkin lots... kinda keepin me at arm's length, ya knows what Ise mean?"

>Spot nodded, his thoughts straying a little. He knew. He shook his head. "So uh.. how's da boys?"<br>Jack shrugged. "Dey aight. T'ings aint so good 'tween Manhattan and Harlem right now 'dough."

>Spot nodded, his glance going to Jack's cheek briefly. "Shuffles did dat dis mornin I he'ah"<br>Jack colored slightly but nodded. "Yeah." He groaned. "Spot what am Ise gonna do? All of me boys ah split ovah dis 'hole ting. Some of dem wanna fight wit Harlem. Oddahs say ta jist give back da blocks dat we'se took last month. Da oldah newsies dont wanna fight wit Shuffles and her newsies, but dey dont want ta give up da territory eithah. And Blink..." Jack hesitated. He looked at the dock and let out a huge sigh. "Blink still wants Shuffles ta come back ta Manhattan." He glanced quickly up at Spot. "It's been two yeahs... he tinks dat Shuffles belongs in Manhattan.. dat its home."

>Spot's face was impassive, but his voice was soft and low. Jack had to strain to hear him. "Youse know dat she wont desaht her newsies in Harlem. Even if youse could convince 'er ta leave, she wont go back ta Manhattan. Not as long as he's 'der." His voice hardened on the last sentence.<br>Jack mentally groaned, and he felt himself tense.

"Spot... youse know dat he didn't mean it... it was an accident! 'e nevah meant ta kill Chance... no one would've. It's been two yeahs... We'se all fohgiven 'im... why's can't youse and Shuffles?"

>Immedietly Jack knew he had said the wrong thing. Spot's eyes were cold, and he was gripping his cane so tightly that his knuckles were turning white. Jack knew that Spot was barely keeping himself from soaking Jack on the spot. "Um.. Spot.. Ise real sorry. I didn't mean it dat way..."<br>"Git out." Spot spoke bitingly.

>"Spot please..."<br>"Ise said git out. Go back ta Manhattan."

>Jack turned to go. He was halfway down the pier before he turned back. "Wait.. whatta I do 'bout da turf war?"<br>Spot glared at him, and even with the distance between them Jack could see the ice in his eyes. "Deal wit it yer self. Just git outta Brooklyn befo'ah Ise have me boys heah soak ya."

>Jack nodded slowly, glancing around at scattered Brooklyn newsies before turning and walking towards the Bridge.<br>Flash waited a few moments before jumping down by his leader's side. "'ey Spot, youse okay?"

>Spot simply glared at him and Flash backed off. Despite the fact that he dwarfed Spot by several inches and in muscle, he knew not to talk to Spot when he was in this sort of mood.<br>Shuffles, coming down behind Flash, watched the exchange. Anger, and sadness, flashed through her. She glared at Spot, coming between him and Flash. "'ey! Whats da mattah wit youse? Flash 'eah is jist tryin ta help."

>Spot pushed her away from him. "Stay outta it Shuffles!"<br>Shuffles fumed. "Dont youse evah do dat Conlon! Ise know how youse feel, I hoid what Cowboy said too. But youse dont see me goin an' pushin everyone 'round do ya?"

>Spot gazed angrily at her from the shadow of his cap. They were shouting now. "How on 'oith could youse know how Ise feel?" In the back of his mind, a voice was yelling at him to shut up but he ignored it, the anger, sadness and bitter hurt controlling him.<br>"I cared about Chance jist as much as youse did Spot!"

>Spot ripped off his hat and glared at her through cold eyes. "Youse kin always git anudda guy Shuffles!" He shouted at her. "Ise aint evah gonna have anudda bruddah! It aint da same!"<br>Shuffles's face drained of color, making her blue eyes stand out. They were filled with anger and hurt, and for a moment it looked like she was going to hit Spot. But instead she turned and ran down the dock. Flash hesitated a moment before chasing after her.

>Spot watched her run, his anger disappating slightly. \*Good going Conlon\* he berated himself. He put his cap back on his head and stalked to the very end of the pier, ignoring the nervous looks that his newsies cast him.<br>Flash caught up with Shuffles as she neared the old Lodging House. "Shuffles wait!"

>The Harlem leader sighed, slowing to a walk and turning around to face him. She crossed her arms across her chest. "Yeah?"<br>"Youse know dat he didn't mean dat stuff he said Shuff..."

>Shuffles sighed, dropping her gaze to the ground. "Yeah Ise know... somehow Ise know dat he's beatin' himself up foh it right now." She managed a ghost of a smile. "It still hoits though, what he said 'bout me gettin' anudda guy."<br>Flash nodded. Personally he thought that Shuffles should find another boyfriend, it had been two years and Shuffles was almost eighteen. But he wisely said nothing. "So where was youse headin?"

>Shuffles shrugged, glancing down the road. "Nowhere really, Ise guess. Back ta Harlem most likely."<br>"Come back ta da new Lodgin' House. Spot only lets da youngah newsies sell one edition a day, so

dey'll be around. An' da oldah newsies... we'se missed havin' ya visit. We'se kin catch up on da past few yeahs."

>Shuffles sighed wearily. "A'ight I guess... I kin come foh a lil' while."<br>~~~~~

>The sun was setting when Shuffles left Brooklyn in the direction of Harlem. She wasn't sure why she had stayed so long; there hadn't been much to do. She and Spot had avoided each other. Instead Shuffles had stayed in the Lodging House, playing cards and getting to know the younger Brooklyn newsies, as well as catching up with her old friends. <br>Shuffles smiled slightly to herself as she thought back briefly. The young newsies, old before their time but still kids at heart, had teased her mercilessly because she couldn't tell the two twins apart. Switch and Blade had delighted in tormenting her, each pretending to be the other until she had given them up as a hopeless cause.

>As Shuffles neared the bridge, she felt someone fall in step with her. Smiling, she stopped underneath the pale light of a street lamp. The newsie stopped with her and grinned up at her from underneath a mess of brown hair. <br>"'eya Shuffles."

>"Hey Runnah. Ise haven't seen youse in yeahs... you look so much like ya bruddah Swifty."<br>The young newsie made a face at her comment. "Everyone sez dat! Ise don't t'ink we'se look a t'ing a like."

>She laughed slightly. "Why's you still in Brooklyn kid? Da cops aint still lookin' foh you, ah dey?"<br>Runner shook his head. "Ah nah, dey gave up ages ago. But since Ise had made friends ovan heah on dis side of da rivah, an' since Ise such a good messengah, Spot said Ise could stay." Runner's face fell a little. "Swifty didn't seem ta cah much eiddah way, so Ise stayed heah."

>Shuffles frowned a little at the thought. "Ise shoih dat he misses ya a lot Runnah... Oh heah, befohe Ise ferget." She reached into the pouch that hung by her side and pulled out a wrapped hotdog. "Ise brought dinnah for yas."<br>"'ey t'anks!" Runner grabbed it. He bit into it before looking up at Shuffles again. "Boots was on look-out but 'es gone now... Manhattan's pulled its look outs already. 'cept for the one at Harlem. I tink Boots said dat Snipes and Race were up at da bohDAH tonight."

>"Tanks Runnah. Heys.. youse goin ta da pokah game tomorraH night?" Shuffles asked.<br>"Yeah! Ise got me money saved up. Harlem goin?" The young newsie bit into his hotdog again.

>Shuffles had to grin. "I wouldn't be able ta keep 'em away."<br>Runner nodded. "Good. Make shoih dat Hearts comes. She owes me thoity cents!"

>"I'll make shoih she pays ya. See ya tamarrah kid."<br>"Night Shuffles." Runner disappeared into the shadows swiftly and silently. Shuffles watched him for a moment, tracing his progress by the faint shadow movements. Satisfied that Runner had gotten back to his post, she continued towards Harlem.

>Shuffles walked quickly through the Manhattan streets. She was careful as she came upon Central Park, keeping her eyes out for lookouts. Jack didn't normally keep them after the sun had set, but it was better to be safe.<br>She didn't see any, and continued silently down the street. From the corner of her eye she saw movement, and quickly flattened herself against the side of the building. Moving only her eyes she looked towards the movement.

>It was Snipeshooter. The young Manhattan newsie had his slingshot out and was pretending to shoot random things. While his back was turned Shuffles quickly moved onward. <br>As she approached the Harlem/Manhattan border Shuffles allowed herself to relax. Only a few blocks from 125th St, and home. Even relaxed, Shuffles was aware of

her surroundings. So when she felt a presence behind her, she quickly moved out of the way. Seconds before a club came down where she had been standing.

>Shuffles backed away into the shadows as she heard her attacker swear. Briefly she glanced around for a weapon or means of escape. But her attention was brought swiftly back as she was rammed in the stomach with the club. She gasped for air and groaned at the stabbing pain in her ribs. Briefly she wondered if they were broken.<br>She stumbled out of the shadows and into the pale circle of light cast by the street lamp. She turned to face her attacker, and immediately straightened. Ignoring the pain in her side, Shuffles glared at the man that stood before her, smirking.

>"Vipah..." She hissed between her teeth at him.<br>Viper mockingly bowed to her, before ramming his club against her ribs again. She was barely able to turn away and she bit her lip hard to keep from crying out, tasting blood in her mouth.

>"Harlem!!! Harlem!!!" Shuffles shouted, desperately hoping that her lookout would hear her. She knew that she couldn't win this fight on her own. Viper was the second in command of the Bowery, the roughest fighters this side of Brooklyn. <br>She managed to avoid most of his blows for a few moments, until Viper knocked her back with a blow to her head. She gasped, panting for air as Viper grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her back.

>He pulled up on it, forcing her on to tip toe. His club lay forgotten on the ground; a dagger had appeared in his hand and he traced it lightly down Shuffles's cheek. When he spoke his voice was low and hypnotic, like the snake he was named for. <br>"Harlem's in trouble Shuffles. Ouh lil' bruddah Mush asked us ta help Manhattan out a lil'. Midtown too. So I hope youse got friends... foh youh sake."

>Shuffles closed her eyes, drawing ragged breaths, as the dagger traced down her neck to her shoulder. She could feel Viper's cold gaze on her face. <br>"So beautiful...youse lucky dat Ise got ordahs not ta hoit youse too bad Shuffles. Not yet anyways. Youse wont be so lucky next time." He increased the upwards pressure on her arm and she bit down on her lip, refusing to cry out in pain.

>The next moment he was gone, slinking back into the shadows and headed in the direction of Central Park. <br>Shuffles sank to the ground by the lamppost after she was sure Viper was gone. She wrapped her arms about her knees, taking deep breaths and trying to ignore the stabbing pain in her ribs and arm. She had understood Viper's implied threat and it had shaken her up badly.

>"Git a hold of yaself Shuffles," she muttered through clenched teeth. "Youse jist gotta git to da Lodging House, and wrap up yah ribs and yah'll be fine."<br>A few moments went by, and Shuffles's breathing slowed and evened. She was still tense though, and her head snapped up when she heard someone coming down the road.

>She groaned as they stepped into the light and she immediately straightened. Wincing at the aching in her ribs, she faced them expressionsly. "Race."<br>Racetrack Higgins took the cigar out of his mouth and eyed Shuffles warily. Mentally he took in her disshelved appearance, the blood on her lip and the growing bruise on her temple. He raised an eyebrow. "Rough night Shuffles?"

>She glared at him. "Wha's it to yah?"<br>Race shrugged noncommittedly, though inwardly he was worried. He glanced down the road, toward 125th St and the Manhattan/Harlem border. He looked back at Shuffles. "Dis is still Manhattan territory. And its gettin late. Why's youse out heah?"

>"Ise goin back tah Harlem. Not dat its any of yoah business."<br>Race rolled his eyes and shot her a look. His eyes

filled with concern when Shuffles suddenly winced and wrapped her arm around her ribs. "Youse okay?"

>Shuffles straightened swiftly, her face showing nothing. In her eyes though, Race could see her pain. "Ise fine!"<br>Race took a long drag on his cigar and sighed heavily. He eyed the young girl that he had once thought of as a sister. "Jeezus Shuffles, whys do we'se gotta fight?? None of da boys wanna fight wit youse. Call off dis wah, an' everyt'ing kin go back ta normal!"

> Shuffles was surprised at the pleading in his voice, but shook her head minuetly. "Ise can't do dat Race. Cowboy took sometin' from Harlem, and we'se want it back."<br>"Youse mean dese'.. what was it, twelve blocks? Cripes! Dat aint worth it Shuffles. Youse really wanna fight da whole of dis island fer a lousy twelve blocks?"

>Shuffles crossed her arms, and managed to conceal the pain it caused her. "Harlem's fightin for da territory from our bordah to da Brooklyn Bridge. We'se aint lookin ta goin 'gainst West Side, Greenwich, Midtown or da Bowery. We'se jist want da East Side."<br>Race's jaw dropped. "Youse cant be serious! Harlem could nevah hold dat much territory!"

>"Youse do, plus more den dat!" Shuffles interrupted.<br>Race shook his head. "Yeahs but.. its different wit da Manhattan boys. Each of us sells alone, and covahs at least five blocks as a sellin spot. Add the fact dat der's almost twice da numbah of Manhattan newsies versus Harlem."

>Shuffles glared at him in defiance. "So's what?" she shouted. "Race der's no way dat Harlem can continue how we'se is! Der's twenty of us wit'in dat twenty blocks. One of us on eva'y block! No one's gettin der papes sold, an' Cowboy's got territory ta spare. Youse can stand ta loose a few blocks."<br>Race shook his head. "Youse cant take dat much territory Shuffles! It's almost a hund'ed blocks.. Plus youse cant leave us, thoity plus newsies, within da small territory of Uppah Manhattan! 'specially not wit da goils up dere. Dat's crazy..." He paused, eyeing her in a new light. "Dis isn't about dos blocks is it? Youse wouldn't challenge us foh so much territory if youse was only mad 'bout dat. What's da catch Shuffles?"

>Shuffles shook her head. "Der ain't no catch."<br>Race pressed her. "Der's gotta be sometin behind dis Shuffles... what is it? Is dis a distrac'ion or sometin?" He paused. "Is dis your way of gettin back at Manhattan foh lettin Pie Eatah remain a newsie?"

>Shuffles's eyes went cold. Race braced himself to be the on the receiving end of a fist or something. But, before Shuffles could react, their attention was grabbed by a figure emerging out of the alley. Race's face fell into a scowl as he recognized him, while Shuffles managed to smile.<br>"'Ey Oscah. What 'ah youse doin dis fah north?" She greeted him.

>Oscar Delancy barely nodded to Race in greeting, both boys' eyes cold as they glanced at each other. However Oscar lost his cold edge as he turned to Shuffles. <br>"'eya Shuffles. Ise was comin ta... jeezah Shuffles! Ah' youse al'ight??"

>Oscar had noticed the dark bruise on her temple, the dried blood on her lip and the way she was holding her arm close to her ribs. But what had Oscar worried the most was the way that she was listing to one side. Oscar turned on Race, not giving Shuffles time to answer.<br>"Who did dis to hah?"

>Race was shocked by the worry in Oscar's eyes and the emotion in his voice. Too stunned to come up with a sharp retort, he simply answered Oscar. "Ise dunno, I jist came ovah heah a moment ago."<br>Oscar glanced back at Shuffles and then stepped closer to Race. Grabbing him by the shirt, Oscar pulled the shorter newsie towards him.

"Listen Race, Ise believe ya. But if Ise find out dat one of yah

Manhattan boys did dis to hah, I'll git da whole of da Crib aftah ya. Youse git it?"

>Race swallowed and nodded. He had never seen Oscar this emotionally wrapped up about something. Oscar pushed him away and turned back to Shuffles. Race straightened his shirt and stuck his cigar back in his mouth. He watched Oscar and Shuffles converse for awhile, and briefly pitied whoever had soaked Shuffles. Sighing, he turned and headed in the direction of the Lodging House. Cowboy had to hear this.

<br>Oscar turned away from Race and walked back to Shuffles's side. He gingerly touched the bruise on her temple and winced. Sighing he looked down at her. "Jeez..." he whispered softly.

>Shuffles looked up at him. She sighed at the concern she read in his eyes. "Ise 'll be a 'ight Oscah," she said lowly. "Ise jist gotta git ta me Lodging House and wrap up me ribs... maybe me arm

too."<br>Oscar nodded. "'nd git some ice on dat bruise of yers..." He paused. "Whats da blood from?"

>Shuffles looked confused for a second. "Blood?... oh yeah dat. Ise bit me lip."<br>Oscar brushed her hair back from her face. "Did da Manhattan boys do dis to yas?" Though his tone was soft, the ice in the question was unmistakable.

>Shuffles looked up at him sharply. "Oscah dis dont concern youse! Its a newsie turf wah, and in case youse fohgot, youse gave up being a newsie tah stay wit Weasel."<br>Oscar winced at the barb. He had been a Harlem newsie as a boy and then as an early teen. He had been one of the newsies that had accepted Shuffles immedietly when she moved to Harlem after Chance's death. However, about a year later Oscar had left the newsies to live with his uncle and half-brother. While Shuffles had remained friends with him, she had never truly forgiven Oscar for leaving Harlem.

>"Ise may not be a newsie no more," he said, "but youse all are still me friends. Youse 'specially." <br>He gave her a once over again and sighed mentally. "Come on..." He wrapped his arm around her waist, careful of her ribs, to help support her. "Ise bettah git youse back ta da Lodgin' House."

>They walked silently for a few moments. When they passed the territory border, Oscar paused. "Who's on lookout?" he asked Shuffles.<br>The Harlem leader frowned in thought. "Thundah Ise t'ink."

>Oscar nodded. "'Ey T'undah!" he called.<br>After a few seconds Flicks appeared. "Ise let T'undah stay at da Lodgin' House wit Shadow." Flicks smiled as he recognized Oscar. "'ey Oscah! 's been awhile. Youse been 'voidin us?"

>Oscar laughed slightly. "Nah.. would Ise do dat?"<br>Flicks grinned. "Well..." He shook his head. "We'se kin catch up latah Oscah..." His voice took a different tone. "Shuffles youse a'ight?"

>Shuffles managed to nod. "Yeah I'se okay. Kin we'se git back ta da Lodgin' House?" Her voice was grim. "We'se got a problem."<br>Flicks eyes went wary. "Whatta ya mean we'se got a problem? Biggah den Cowboy?" He whistled through his teeth. "Tell me's now.. Ise cant leave dah bo'dah ungua'ded."

>Shuffles sighed. "Seem's like we'se aint jist fightin wit Cowboy anymoah... Vipah paid me a visit. Seems like a coiten Manhattan newsie asked da Bowery ta help dem, and Midtown's helpin too." Her voice was dry.<br>Flick's eyes went wide. "Al'eady? But youse jist talked ta Cowboy dis mornin!"

>Shuffles shrugged. "Ise guessin dat when Cowboy was talkin wit Spot, oddahs were talkin' to oddah leadahs. Vipah didn't mention anyt'ing bout West Side or Greenwich... who knows w'ats goin on wit dem."<br>Flicks laughed half-heartedly. "Dis is kinda ironic. Conlon was usin' Harlem ta fight 'is wah so dat no one would choose sides,

but its happenin anyways! Ise hope dat he's gonna back us still... 'specially now."

>Shuffles nodded. "He will... Queens and da Bronx'll fight wit Brooklyn..."<br>"Wait a second!" Oscar broke in. "Whats dis 'bout Spot? He's usin Harlem ta fight Cowboy?" Oscar looked confused and mad at the same time.

>Shuffles groaned. Both she and Flicks had forgotten that Oscar was listening. She sighed. "I'll tell yas on da way to da Lodging House. Which we ah' goin ta, right?"<br>Oscar and Flicks both nodded. "Go.." Flicks said. "Thundah's releavin me tomarrah mornin, so Ise'll talk wit youse den a'ight?"

>Shuffles nodded. "A'ight." <br>Flicks disappeared into the shadows. Shuffles and Oscar started on their way again, as Shuffles proceeded to tell Oscar the whole story. She left nothing out; starting with Spot's visit and ending with the conversation between her and Race.

>She told the story quickly, and so was just finishing it up as they came to the steps of the Lodging House. Oscar paused outside. "Wow... so youse tink dat Spot'll still stand wit youse?"<br>Shuffles sighed, her eyes empty. "Ise dunno. He swoah dat he would... but dat was befoh' dis aftahnoon. Now, I dunno."

>Oscar turned Shuffles to look him in the eye. "'ey, dont worry 'bout it. Ise may not like 'im too much, but Conlon's a newsie of his woid. Specially if he's anyt'ing like Chance. But remembah... no mattah what, Harlem's got me support. And da Crib's, if it comes ta dat."<br>Shuffles smiled slightly. "Tanks Oscah."

>He smiled. "Youse welcome." He leaned down and kissed her cheek.

"Now come on.... lets git youse cleaned up."<br>

>Race walked into the Lodging House, flipping a coin to Kloppman as he passed. "Kin ya sign me in, Kloppman?" he asked the old man.<br>Kloppman grumbled good naturedly as he turned the ledger book around. Race grinned as he headed up the stairs. "T'anks Klopps."

>Race slowed his steps as he approached the bunkroom. He stopped in the doorway and just looked at his friends and fellow newsies.<br>All though the scene seemed relaxed enough, there was an underlaying feeling of uneasy tension. Bumlets, Skittery, Jake and Swifty were playing a half-hearted game of poker in the far corner, with Specs, Snitch and Dutchy looking on. Mush, Jack, Crutchy and David were talking rather heatedly near the window. Blink was lying on his bunk, looking depressed. Pie Eater was in a similar position like Blink, only he had Snoddy trying to cheer him up. Boots and Tumbles were playing marbles with Les on the floor by the doorway.

>Race's observations were interrupted as Jack looked up from his argument with Mush and saw him standing in the doorway.<br>"Race!" Jack strolled over to where Race was standing in the doorway. The short Italian looked up at his leader, pulling his cigar from his mouth. Jack stopped yelling before he started when he saw the worry and concern on his friend's face. "What's goin on Race? Watcha doin' back heah?"

>Race sighed. "It's Shuffles," he said softly.<br>A silence swept through the room. Even the youngest newsies were quiet. Blink sat up, swinging his legs over to dangle off the side of his bunk. Jack glanced over at him before looking back at Race. "Whatta youse mean Race?"

>Race hesitated, glancing past Jack to look at Mush. "She uh.. well see uh..." He sighed heavily. "She's hoit Jack. Someone soaked 'ah on hoih way back ta Harlem."<br>Blink groaned and fell back on to his bed. Quite a few of the younger newsies shot him quizzacle looks, but he ignored them. Jack's eyes were hard. "Do yas know whos it was

Race?"

>Race shook his head, but he again glanced at Mush. "Nah... Ise got me suspicions do'gh."<br>Jack frowned. "Who woulda done it? Not one of da Manhattan boys.. dey've been heah all night... Brooklyn maybes?" He shook his head. "Nah Brooklyn an' Harlem haven't fought since Spot an' Shuffles took ovah." He looked back at Race. "Who's da youse suspect?"

>Race shrugged, his gaze downcast. He glanced up quickly, meeting the eyes of Mush, who had turned white. Jack turned, following his gaze. "Mush? Youse know anyt'ing 'bout dis?"<br>Mush gulped audibly. He ran his hand up behind his neck nervously. Not meeting Jack's gaze, he nodded. "Well uh... see Jack, when youse went ta tawk wit Spot... Race and me, we'se went ta visit da boys in da Bowery an' stuff... Wese well.. wese kinda mentioned da problem wit Harlem... an'..."

>Mush was cut off by a loud cracking noise. All the newsies jumped, and looked at Jack who was rubbing his fist. The wood of the bunk next to him was dented. Jack glared at Mush. "Youse did WHAT? Why would youse tell da Bowery dat? Youse know how dey are when it comes ta territorial wars!"<br>Mush gulped again, and back up. "S.. s.. sorry Jack..."

>Jack sighed. "Fergit it Mush..." He looked around, calmer. "Okay.. so we'se tink dat it coulda been da Bowery... anyone else it coulda been dough? What 'bout da Delancys?"<br>Race shook his head. "Was prolly Vipah... maybe Ice. Definitely not da Delancys."

>David looked confused. "Why not the Delancys?"<br>Race shifted uncomfortably. "Well uh.. cuz Oscah showed up a lil' aftah I did an' he wasn't happy when he saw da way dat Shuffles was..."

>Dave was still very confused. "Um... why would Oscar care about the condition of a Harlem newsie?"<br>Blink sighed from his position on his bed. "'s not common knowledge.. but Oscah used ta be a newsie in Harlem... when Shuffles left us heah an' went ta Harlem dey became friends. But Oscah left Harlem ta live wit his uncle and half-bruddah at da Woild. Dey stayed friends dough... even aftah Oscah became a scab."

>Mush was looking at Blink a little amazed; it was the most he had spoken all day. David was trying to imagine Oscar as a newsie, and Jack was mulling over the fact that Oscar and Morris were only half-brothers. The other newsies were getting bored with the conversation, and were drifting off back to their activities. Race coughed a little, to get everyone's attention.<br>Jack looked up at him. "Yeah Race?"

>"Well ya see Cowboy.." Race sighed. "Ah fergit this. Looks.. Oscah said dat if he finds out dat one of us hoit Shuffles, he's gonna git da Crib aftah us."<br>Jack groaned. "Dis is great, jist great." He turned and banged his head against the bunk a few times. "Damnit Damnit damnit!"

>Mush and Blink exchanged uneasy glances. Suddenly Jack stopped, rubbing his forehead a little. "We'se in trouble... we'se gotta organize. Who's wit us?"<br>David started ticking points off on his hand. "We've got the Bowery with us."

>"Midtown too" Race added.<br>Jack shook his head. "Ise cant believe da Bowery is wit us. We don't exactly git along wit dem." He glared at Mush.

>Mush gulped. "All Ise did was mention dat we'se was fightin' wit Harlem! Ise didn't know dat dey'd fight wit us, specially since dey don't like Manhattan at all. An' since dey don't have much ta do wit me, since Shreddah died."<br>Jack nodded. "Ise don't get it eiddah... but since dey fightin' wit us, I aint gonna question it."

>Race coughed. "We'se got anuddah problem d'ough. When Spot heahs

'bout Shuffles, he'll help hoih."<br>Jack frowned. "Spot an' Shuffles haven't even spoken in yeahs. Why would he help hoih out?"<br>Race shrugged. "Old loyalties? Ise dunno... But Ise gotta t'ink. Shuffles was headin' back ta Harlem pretty late, an' comin' from da South. Dere ain't nobody south a' here dat she'd be talkin' to, cept foh Brooklyn."<br>Jack whistled through his teeth. "If Spot is helpin' Shuffles, den we'se gonna be in trouble. Queens and da Bronx will do whatevah Brooklyn does. So will Greenwich. Dublin wont do nothin' ovah in West Side, but he ain't lettin' no body past da bordah. Long Isle hates ta git mixed up wit da city wars, an' Staton's too fah south ta be important. So dats Harlem, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, an' Greenwich, not ta mention da Crib all against us, da Bowery and Midtown." Jack groaned.<br>"What about the girls in Upper Manhattan?" David asked. "Wouldn't they help us?"<br>Bumlets shook his head; he was on a bunk where he was listening to the conversation and playing poker. "Nah," he said, not glancing up from his cards. "Dey too busy tryin ta keep der own territory. Skates told me da uddah day dat dey gots a mutiny problem."<br>Jack sighed. "So whatah wese gonna do?"<br>Race shrugged.

>~~~~~<br>Oscar carefully helped Shuffles up the stairs to the door of the Lodging House. He knocked on the door three times. After a moment the door opened a crack. Bolt, the newsie on lobby duty for the night, peered out through the crack. When he recognized Oscar he threw the door open. "Oscah!"<br>Oscar grinned at his friend. "'Eya Bolt. Heah... help me git Shuffles inside."<br>Bolt glanced at his leader. "Oh man..." He quickly moved out of the way so Oscar and Shuffles could get inside. "DOC!" He called up the stairwell. "GIT DOWN HEAH!"<br>Shuffles sat down on a worn sofa and stretched out, as Oscar turned to close and lock the door. Moments later, a girl of about 15 ran down the stairs. She paused to smile when she saw Oscar before walking over to Shuffles. When she saw the condition her leader was in she sighed.<br>"Shuffles... what happened ta youse?"<br>"Ey Doc. Ise jist got in a lil' fight wit Vipah..." <br>Doc's brown eyes widened. "Vipah? From da Bowery? Why?"<br>"Turns out dat Manhattan has da Bowery and Midtown helpin 'em in dis turf war..."<br>Doc groaned. "Great..." she sighed. "Aight, tell me in a sec. Foist we'se gotta fix youse up."<br>Doc turned to Oscar, who was standing in the doorway with a concerned look on his face. "Oscah kin youse go git some ice? Ise tink dat we'se got some down in da cellah."<br>Oscar nodded. "Shoiht'ing Doc." He turned and headed down the stairs to the cellar.

>Doc turned back to Shuffles. "Aight, foist tings foist. Da ice is foh dat bruise of youahs... Youse got a headache?"<br>Shuffles shrugged a little. "Kinda."<br>Doc dug into the pouch she carried at her side. "Heah.. take dis. It'll git rid of dat headache... prolly de pain too."<br>Shuffles swallowed the pill that Doc gave her. Doc's eyes quickly swept over Shuffles. She frowned slightly. "Let me see youah ahm." Shuffles complied.<br>Doc sighed. "What'd he do? Twist it behind ya or sometin?" She shook her head at Shuffle's affirmative. "Aight..." Reaching into her pouch again she pulled out a roll of cloth. "Youah elbow is sprained and yer wrist is only twisted. Youse lucky he didnt snap it. Dat pill will git rid of da pain in da muscles." She quickly wrapped Shuffle's elbow and wrist with the cloth.<br>Oscar walked back into the room with a cloth wrapped around some ice. "Heah..." He gave it to Doc,

who placed it against Shuffles's temple. "Hold it heah," she told Oscar. He complied, sitting on the arm of the sofa.

>Doc looked back at Shuffles. "What else happened?"<br>Shuffles shifted uncomfortably. "He got me in da side wit his club..."

>Doc looked alarmed. "Did he break anyt'ing?"<br>"Ise dont tink so..."

>Doc sighed. "I'll have ta check... ya need ta take off dat ovah shirt 'dough."<br>Shuffles complied, carefully using her good hand to unbutton the loose white shirt, revealing a tight white undershirt. Doc carefully prodded Shuffles ribs, causing her to wince in pain. Doc sighed in relief. "Youse didnt break not'in... dey prolly jist bruised... maybe cracked a lil' but Ise cant do not'in bout dat. Da best Ise kin do is tape 'em up, and hope dat youse dont git hit der again."

>Shuffles nodded. "Aight.. yeah tape 'em up."<br>Doc looked up at Oscar. "Youse might want ta leave da room Oscah..."

>"What? Oh.. " he blushed. "Shoih.. Ise gonna go see da oddahs." He kissed Shuffles on the forehead before heading up the stairs to the bunkroom.<br>Doc chuckled as she pushed Shuffles's undershirt up slightly so she could tape up her ribs. "Dat guy has it so bad foh youse."

>"Whatah youse talkin 'bout Doc?" Shuffles asked, wincing as Doc jarred her ribs as she wrapped them.<br>"Oscah. Dat boy is so in love wit you." Doc said, almost wistfully.

>"Oscah? In love wit me?" Shuffles colored slightly and laughed.

"Yeah right.. he's like, me best friend!" <br>"Maybe so.. but its soo obvious Shuffles!" Doc ripped off the last of the tape and started putting her supplies away. Shuffles carefully buttoned her topshirt back up.

>"Whatevah Doc... "<br>"Its true! And youse so lucky Shuffles.. Oscah is so handsome..." She sighed.

>Shuffles rolled her eyes and grinned. "Youse hopeless Doc...almost as bad as Ditz."<br>Doc's eyes widened. "Nevah!"

>The two girls exchanged glances and laughed. "Come on..." Shuffles said, climbing to her feet. "Lets go upstaiahs.."<br>They both said goodnight to Bolt before heading up the stairs. He waved absently to them, wrapped up in a book.

>Doc sighed as she headed up the stairs. She glanced sideways at Shuffles, who seemed lost in thought. "How was da trip ta Brooklyn?"<br>Shuffles blinked, keeping her gaze down. Her voice was soft. "Hard... dere's lots of memories still dere." She smiled slightly. "But Ise talked ta some ol' friends... an' dat was nice."

>Doc smiled. "So it was bittersweet huh?"<br>"Yeah..." Shuffles trailed off as they came to the bunkroom. Doc entered first, immedietly going over to the group of newsies that were talking to Oscar. Shuffles paused in the doorway, taking in the scene. The older newsies were talking to Oscar... the newer newsies were spread out around the room, all doing their own thing. Shuffles was slightly surprised to notice a few Brooklyn newsies around the room.

>Shadow detached herself from Thunder and walked over to Shuffles. Her eyes widened at the sight of Shuffles's injuries. "Rough night Shuff?"<br>Shuffles nodded. "Youse could say dat. Ise need ta talk wit you... an'..." Her eyes skimmed the room. "Dice... Guy..." She paused. "'ey where's Flute and Carrot?"

>"Oh... dey went ta Greenwich for da night. Wanted ta see some ol' friends."<br>Shuffles's eyes widened. "Did dey git dere before it got dark?"

>Shadow nodded. "Yeah I was wit 'em..." she peered closely at her

leader. "'ey Shuffles youse okay?"<br>Shuffles nodded. "I'll be fine..." Shuffles climbed up on to a chest and whistled. The newsies quieted down and looked up expectantly at their leader. Quite a few of them looked alarmed at her condition.

>"Shuffles wha'd youse do? Try ta fight a wall again?" One of the younger newsies quipped. His friends snickered <br>"Looks like the wall won!" another newsies called out. Oscar's lips twitched as he recalled a certain girl during the strike that had had a certain skill in hitting a wall.

>Most of the newsies were laughing, or trying not to laugh. Even Shuffles had to laugh. "Okay okay... serious now." All merriment died down slightly. "Ise dont want any of youse goin off by yaselves ya got it? Youse gotta be mighty carefal..."<br>"How's come Shuffles?" The young newsie who had spoken was sitting by Shuffles's feet. They called her Mouse, because she was as quiet and timid as one.

>Shuffles sighed, suddenly feeling older than her 17 years. "Da Bowery and Midtown have joined up wit Manhattan."<br>A loud 'What?' was the general reaction around the room. Shuffles whistled again. "Alla youse shuttup!"

>The newsies quieted again. "Now... Ise said dat da Bowery and Midtown have joined wid Manhattan and dey have. So jist sell in pairs, and dont let no-body's go off alone, a'ight?" There was a general murmur of agreement. "Kay den. Ise need ta see Dice, Guy, Doc, Shadow and Thundah. Oscah youse kin come too."<br>She hopped down from the chest and walked into the side room. The newsies broke off into groups, returning to their activities. The five newsies Shuffles had named, along with Oscar, detached themselves from the group and made their way to the side room.

>Dice grinned at Oscar as she walked into the small room that the Harlem newsies used for conferences. "Hey Oscah. Welcome back ta Harlem. We missed youse, ya bum."<br>Any Manhattan newsies would have been shocked to see Oscar's reaction to Dice's greeting. He laughed, with no hint of malice, and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

"I'se missed ya'll too. 'Cept for you Dice... and your gamblin' ways." He smirked at her. "Finally win any craps games?"

>Dice pretended to be hurt, while the others simply rolled their eyes. Dice joined the others by taking a chair and looked up at her leader. Oscar moved to stand by Shuffles, discretely wrapping his arm around her waist in support. Shuffles didn't seem to notice, but Dice exchanged an amused glance with Shadow and Doc smirked slightly.<br>"A'ight, we'segot a problem. Now whatta we'se do 'bout it?" Shuffles glanced around at her best friends.

>Thunder frowned. "Now dat we'se fightin' wit Jack, Scah and Diamond, Spot's gotta come fohwahd and support us. Dont 'e?"<br>Dice snorted. "Spot ain't even talked to Harlem in almost two yeahs, 'cept foh da uddah night. Ise say, we don't trust 'im."

>Doc sighed. "Youse don't trust nobody Dice."<br>Dice glared. "Why should Ise? We'se barely have any interaction wit da guy, an' now he shows up wantin' us ta fight wit' Downtown Manhattan so HE can claim da Brooklyn Bridge? Ise don't like it."

>Shuffles shifted uncomfortably. "Ise talked wit Flash, an' he said dat Spot's been watchin' Harlem foh awhiles. An' dat Spot's tryin' ta help us out, al'dough his way is kinda twisted."<br>Dice smirked.

"Fine, aint dat jist great. So he's helpin' us out... dats a good start. Does dat mean he's gonna back us officially wit' dis wah goin' on?"

>Shuffles shrugged slightly, being careful of her injuries. "I'se um.. Ise dunno. He and I kinda got in an arguement dis aftahnoon..."<br>Guy gave a snort of laughter as he leaned back in

his chair. "So what else is new Shuffles? Da guys a joik... everyone fights wit him nowadays."

>Shuffles sighed, thinking back to her conversation with Flash.

"Yeah... dats true. Everyone's fightin' wit him... but Ise t'ink, hell Ise hope dat he's serious in helpin' us. Cuz we'se cant git outta dis t'ing now."<br>Oscar tighted his arm a little about her waist, giving her a sort of backwards hug. He looked around at the others. "Ise only know what I hoid from Shuff heah.. but da t'ing is, Spot stahted dis fight. He's gotta stand wit youse. Sides, he swohah he'd stand wit youse didnt he?"

>Shadow nodded. "Yeah he did. On Chance's memory."<br>The newsies in the room were silent for a moment at the mention of Chance. Oscar too was silent, for he had known Chance during his time as a Harlem newsie. Chance had been the most respected and well-liked newsie of New York in a long time.

>Dice cleared her throat, breaking the silence. "So we'se trust da lil' pup. Send a runnah to 'im once its light out. Tell 'im what happened to ya... and tell 'im dat Scah and Diamond are backin' Cowboy." She looked around at the others. <br>Shuffles nodded. "A'ight." She paused. "We'se kin talk wit Spade and Phoenix tamorrow."

>Thunder looked at her, confused. "Why's we gonna talk wit da Bronx and Queens? Ise figured dat dey'd fallow Spot."<br>Shuffles couldn't help but grin. "Prolly. But we'se might as well talk wit 'em.. since we'se goin to da pokah game at BJ's tamorrow night..."

>Guy was on his feet in a second. "Al'right!" He literally bounced out of the room. "POKAH GAME IN DA BRONX TAMORROH NIGHT!" They heard him yell once he entered the bunkroom.<br>Dice laughed as she climbed to her feet. "A pokah game wit da Bronx boys. Dis is gonna be fun." She headed out of the room, slightly calmer than Guy.

>Shadow raised an eyebrow at Shuffles, who answered the unspoken question. "Spot invited us along. Ise t'ink dat he 'membered that Ise good friends wit BJ."<br>Shadow's eyes lit with remembrance. "Youse knew him in Manhattan right?"

>Shuffles nodded. "Yeah... back when Ise foist became a newsie, and he was still leadah."<br>Thunder grinned. "It'll be good ta see Phoenix and da guys again. I aint seen 'em since Ise left Queens a couple months ago." He wrapped his arm around Shadow's shoulders and led her back to the bunkroom, where the newsies were all discussing the upcoming poker game.

>Shuffles looked back over her shoulder at Oscar. "So, youse comin' tamorrow?"<br>Oscar looked surprised. "Youse want me ta come along?"

>"Of c'oise we'se do!" Doc exclaimed. Oscar looked over at her. She stood up, on her way out the door. "Youse may not be a newsie no more Oscah, but youse still a friend! 'Sides..." she grinned wickedly. "Ise wanna see Spot's face when youse come in wit Harlem tamorrow." She headed out the door before Oscar responded.<br>He glanced at Shuffles, slightly making a face. "Do Ise gotta put up wid Spot foh a whole night?"

>Shuffles grinned. "Dont t'ink of it as youse puttin up wid him, t'ink of it as him puttin' up wid youse. Sides, Doc's right. It'll be fun ta see 'is face when youse walk in."<br>Oscar sighed, turning slightly so he could fall back on to a worn sofa. "Why's he hate me Shuffles? Ise mean... all da newsies... 'cept for da ones in Harlem, all seem ta have forgotten dat I was a newsie too."

>Shuffles sat on the edge of the sofa, and faced Oscar. He looked up at her, his dark eyes troubled. She reached out and brushed his hair back off his forehead. "Dey don't all hate ya Oscah... Bronx an' Queens dont... da Manhattan boys, well youse is pretty rotten ta

dem..." <br>Oscar shook his head. "But its not me, its Morris!" He paused. "Well okay, so Ise done some of it but Ise aint soaked nobodies! 'Cept Davy an' dat was durin' da strike." >Shuffles frowned slightly. "Whyse do yas do everyt'ing dat Morris tells ya Oscah? He's really ruinin' youse rep..."<br>Oscar paled under his tan. He suddenly found a reason to look everywhere but Shuffles. "I uh... well ya see hes me bruddah right? An' hes oldah 'n biggah so..." Oscar shrugged. >Shuffles narrowed her eyes. "Did 'e evah hoit ya Oscah?"<br>"No!"

>Shuffles caught Oscar's gaze and held it. For a few moments he was silent, then Oscar sighed. "Once, when Ise foist went wid 'im ta live at da Woild. Ise didnt wanna soak dis newsie... Ise helped him git aways from Morris... Morris was real mad... an' he uh.. well Ise dont argue wit 'im anymore."<br>Shuffles's eyes softened. "Ise sorry Oscah... we'se din' know."

>Oscar shrugged. "No one does, an' dats how it stays. As foh da Manhattan boys... wells dey desoive almost everyt'ing we'se give 'em."<br>Shuffles lifted an eyebrow. "Why?"

>"Ise helped dis newsie git away from Morris right? I t'ink 'is name is Tumbles. Well da next night Ise walkin' back ta da Woild and Ise git jumped. By Manhattan newsies, two of 'em. Dey soaked me real good... jist cuz i was related ta Morris!" Oscar looked up at Shuffles. "Evah since den it aint to hard ta be mean ta da Manhattan guys. Sides ise dont soak 'em... jist pick on 'em a lil'."<br>Shuffles leaned down and gave Oscar a hug, as best she could manage. He hugged her back, resting his head on her good shoulder. She pulled away and sat back to look at him. "A lil' huh? What about Davy and Sarah? No Ise dont like Sarah much but youse guys were pretty rough ta her."

>Oscar shook his head. "No... Morris was rough wit her. Ise jist kinda... well taunted Davy. Ise was holding Davy and Morris was da one wit da brass knuckles. We was pretty bad ta dem... But Ise jist didnt want Morris beatin me again! He waked me ovah a lil' cuz Ise told Cowboy what we'se was gonna do... warnin' 'im a lil'...."<br>Shuffles looked at Oscar in surprise. "Youse warned Cowboy?"

>Oscar nodded. "Yeah... so he's could do somet'in bout it... it woiked too. He showed up didn' he?"<br>Shuffles slowly nodded her head. "yeah..."

>Oscar shrugged. "Dat's bout da only time dat ise beat up anyone... Ise jist make fun of da guys." He sighed. "Dey dont git how lucky dey are..."<br>Shuffles was silent for a moment as she searched his eyes. "Youse know Oscah... you kin always come back ta da newsies. Harlem'll take ya in a second." She lifted her good hand to gesture with, growing excited. "You kin have your old bunk back... An' youh sellin spot! No one's claimed it yet... an'..."

>Oscar gently took her hand in his own, and kissed the top of it. "Shuffles... Ise would come back ta da newsies in a second. But Morris is me bruddah... he and me uncle are da only family Ise got."<br>Shuffles interrupted him. "But the newsies are ye family too!"

>Oscar laughed slightly, as he brushed strands of her hair behind her ear. "Aye, youse guys are. Morris... he knows dat Ise friends wit youse guys. He tolerates dat. But if Ise left... Ise dunno what he'd do. He might send da Crib aftah me. And as much as I wish Ise could come back ta Harlem ta stay..." His eyes searched hers and unconsciously he drew closer to her. "Ise wont put Harlem in da dangah of havin da Crib against dem..." His eyes searched her face as they drew nearer to one another. Oscar's voice dropped. "Ise wont put you

in dat dangah..." Shuffles's eyes fluttered shut as Oscar lowered his lips towards hers.<br>Both jerked away before their lips could touch at a loud crash by the doorway. Glancing over towards the door, Shuffles saw the young newsie that had made the earlier joke about the wall, Quips, entering the room. His eyes lit with a mischievous flame when he saw how close Oscar and Shuffles were sitting on the sofa.

>"Ise really hope dat Ise is interruptin' somet'in," he said.<br>Shuffles rolled her eyes. "Whatta ya want Quips?"<br>>"'Eh." He waved his hand airily. "Hearts jist wanted ta know if we'se were all goin' ta da game tamorrow night. An' Doc wanted ta know if Oscah is stayin da night." <br>Shuffles glanced back at Oscar for confermation. He nodded and she turned back to Quips. "Tell Hearts dat anyone dat wants ta go tamorrow night can.. an dat she's gotta pay Runnah da thoity cents she owes 'im. An' yeah... Oscah'll be spendin' da night heah."

>Quips grinned wickedly. "Should we'se get a bunk ready foh 'im... or will youse be takin' care of dat?" <br>Shuffles shot him a glare, and Oscar tossed a sofa-pillow at him. Quips ducked out of the room laughing.

>Shuffles rolled her eyes once Quips was gone. "Sorry 'bout dat."<br>Oscar chuckled softly. "Don't worry 'bout it."

>Seconds later they both heard Shadow yelling. "Go ta bed youse guys! We'se gotta sell tamorrow, den its da pokah game! So go ta sleep."

There was a few moments of groans and murmuring voices then, "Shuffles! Git in heah an' tell dese guys ta go ta bed! Ise dont care what youse is doin wit Oscah, git in heah!" Laughter sounded from the bunk room.<br>Shuffles was out the door in a second. Oscar waited and heard the laughter die down. Shuffles's voice drifted down the hallway. "Git in bed! Shadow if youse an' Thunder sneak off again tonight Ise sending Rumor aftah youse." Snickers exploded from the room. Oscar could just imagine Shadow turning beet red and mumbling under her breath as she went to bed.

>Moments later Shuffles came back into the room. "Youse kin sleep in yer old bunk for da night." Oscar nodded and Shuffles looked up at him. "Da offah still stands Oscah. If youse evah decide youse need ta leave Weasel an' Morris... da door 'll be open foh ya."<br>Oscar nodded as he climbed to his feet, covering his mouth as he yawned. He leaned down and kissed Shuffles's forehead as he passed her. "Night Shuffles."

>"G'night Oscah." She watched him until he walked into the bunkroom. Then she turned and leaned over the railing next to the stairwell.<br><br>>"G'night Bolt!" she called down softly.

>"'night Shuffles." <br>Shuffles walked into the bunkroom, pushed the last few stragglers into bed, and jumped into her own bunk. She hit the lights and the newsies of Harlem fell asleep.

><br>Shuffles randomly banged on the headboards of the bunks as she passed. "Git up!" She laughingly ducked pillows that were thrown her way. "Come on guys! We'se got papes ta sell."

>The newsies grumbling got out of bed, stumbling into the washroom and getting dressed. Shuffles stood on the edge of a lower bunk and looked over at Oscar, who was still asleep on his top bunk. "Hey Oscah! If we'se gotta git up, den youse gotta git up!"<br>Oscar grumbled as he opened one eye to look at her. "Yeah yeah..." He sat up, and looked over at the clock on the wall. "Whyse do youse guys git up same time as Manhattan, when Harlem dont git its papes till latah?"

>Shuffles carefully climbed down from the bunk, grabbing a clean shirt off of her bed. "We'se don' usually. But some of us is goin ta Manhattan today, dats why." She winced at the pain in her arm as she

pulled her shirt on over her undershirt. She buttoned it carefully, one handed.<br>Oscar yawned as he passed her, holding his shirt in his hand as he absently pulled his suspenders over his bare shoulders. "Makes sense Ise guess..." He headed towards the washroom. Shuffles eyes followed him, as did Ditz's and Doc's.

>Once Oscar was out of sight, Doc came running over to Shuffles. The younger girl grinned. "Ise told youse dat he liked ya!"<br>Shuffles rolled her eyes, as she grabbed her brush and ran it through her semi-short hair. "Do youse got anymore of dat pain stuff?" she asked Doc. "Ise got dis awful headache..."

>Doc quickly dug into her pouch and produced the white pill. "yeah... its asprin. Da oddah one musta worn off."<br>Shuffles simply swallowed the pill. Doc eyed her arm. "Youse should put dat in a sling..."

>Shuffles looked at her. "Why?"<br>"Cuz it'll heal fastah. Here.." Doc pulled a piece of cloth around Shuffles's arm and tied it behind her neck. "Keep it against youh body as much as possible."

>Shuffles shifted the sling around her neck as she headed down the stairs. The newsies were lounging in the lobby. Shuffles waited until the last stragglers were downstairs before speaking.<br>"Thundah, when youse go relieve Flicks, move da bordah to 122nd street. If da Manhattan look out gives ya trouble when he shows up, soak 'em."

>Thunder nodded slightly. Shuffles glanced around. "Who's on lobby duty today?"<br>Ditz stepped forward. "Ise is takin ovah for Flicks, cuz he was on look out last night." She smiled, twirling her hair around her finger.

>Shuffles nodded, and hid her smirk as she saw Quips immitating Ditz. "A'ight.. who's sellin foh ya today den?"<br>Ditz shrugged. Shuffles glanced at Nail, but he raised his hands in a "not me" gesture. "Ise is sellin foh Thundah today."

>Shuffles raised an eyebrow, thought a moment, and then turned to Oscar with a smirk. "Youse t'ink youse kin still sell papes Oscah?"<br>Oscar pretended to look offended. "Of coise Ise kin still sell papes!"

>Shuffles nodded. "Good. Den youse wanna sell foh Ditz?"<br>Oscar shrugged. "Shoih. Morris kin handle da papes at da Woild without me."

>Shuffles looked thoughtful. "Do ye think he'd mind ye sellin' papes?"<br>Oscar frowned. "Yeah.. but not to much... he knows dat I sold papes 'fohe livin' wit him."

>Shuffles nodded. "Kay den youse is comin' wit me ta Manhattan. Flicks will come wit us..." Shuffles looked down at Quips, who was busy mimicing her. "Quips too. Hearts an' Dice, youse wanna come?" The two girls nodded. "A'ight... lets go."<br>The Harlem newsies dispersed. Thunder headed for the border, Quips, Dice and Hearts following. Shuffles glanced at Bullet and Strokes, two of the Brooklyn newsies that had stayed the night in Harlem.

>"Youse goin' back ta Brooklyn?"<br>Strokes nodded, crossing his arms over his chest. Bullet looked at her from under the shadow of his cap. "Youh arm a'ight?"

>Shuffles looked down at her right arm. Her wrist and elbow were wrapped up tightly, and the sling kept them close to her body. "Yeah it'll be a'ight. Tell Spot dat Ise gotta talk wit 'im, when youse git back."<br>Strokes pushed his hair out of his eyes. "Shoih, we'll tell 'im. See ya at da game tonight Shuffles."

>She nodded. "Yeah see ya."<br>The two Brooklyn newsies disappeared quickly. Shuffles watched them go for a few seconds before turning to Oscar. The two of them started the walk to Manhattan.

>"Oscah, are youse okay wit dis? Ise mean, buyin' papes at da Woild an' all?"<br>Oscar nodded. "Yeah it's fine... Morris, he jist don't like da Manhattan newsies. 'specially cuz of Cowboy. My uncle likes you... well more den he likes da othahs. Dey wont have a big problem wit it.. 'less Ise do it everyday."

>Shuffles smiled. "Dat's bettah den nothin'..." She hesitated. "Well, wha' bout Jack's guys?"<br>Oscar shrugged. "'eh dey'll live wit it." He grinned. "Sides it'll be fun ta suhprise dem."

>Shuffles looked up at him. "I was dere dat day..."<br>Oscar looked over at her. "Which day?"

>"Da one dat dey started da strike. Only foh a few minutes..." She grinned up at him. "Long 'nough ta see youse makin' fun of me bruddah."<br>Oscar laughed. "Oh yeah... sorry 'bout dat... it was jist too easy."

>Shuffles grinned. "Ise found it amusin'..."<br>Oscar rolled his eyes, and slung his arm around her shoulders. "Well I'm glad Ise keep you amused."

>She smirked. "Of cou'se... whys else do youse t'ink we put up wit youse?"<br>"'Ey!"

>Shuffles laughed at his indignant response and ran towards Dice, who was waiting at the World gates, with Oscar chasing after her.<br>Shuffles caught her breath sharply outside the gates. Dice looked at her in concern. "Youse alright?"

>Shuffles nodded. "Yeah... note ta self.. don't run wit bruised ribs evah again."<br>Dice laughed. Shuffles took a deep breath. "A'ight I'm fine. Lets go in."

>Oscar sighed as he noticed Shuffles's face go emotionless the second they walked into the circulation yard. Around her newsies, and her close friends, Shuffles smiled, joked and laughed. Around everyone else Shuffles was cold and sarcastic, aloof and emotionless. It had been that way ever since Chance had died.<br>Oscar followed Shuffles up the platform, past the newsies and up to the counter. He ignored the looks that most of the newsies cast him. He cut off Race and Mush to lean against the counter next to Shuffles.

>Weasel looked up at his nephew with a raised eyebrow. "Where were you last night?"<br>Shuffles answered for Oscar. "Ah he stayed at da Harlem Lodgin' House last night. He was jist visitin' too late, so we'se made 'em stay. Don't be mad at 'im Mistah Wiesel." Shuffles blinked innocently at Weasel, and Oscar had to cough in his hand to hide his snicker.

>Weasel eyed her shrewdly then just sighed. "Fine. Youse workin' today boy?" He asked Oscar.<br>Oscar glanced at Shuffles before turning to his uncle. "Actually Ise sellin' today. One of da goils up in Harlem isn't sellin' today an' asked me ta sell foh her. Its alright aint it?" He ignored the startled murmurings of the newsies behind him.

>Weasel glanced at Morris, who was reading a copy of the paper. Morris looked up when Weasel nudged him. "What?"<br>Weasel rolled his eyes. "Do youse mind if youh bruddah sells papes today? Helpin' a goil out in Harlem."

>Morris's eyes glinted dangerously, but he shrugged. "Yeah fine." He turned back to his paper.<br>Weasel turned back to Oscar and Shuffles. "Be home foh dinnah," he told Oscar.

>Oscar glanced at Shuffles. "What times da pokah game?"<br>Shuffles looked up. "Oh.. uh 10 o'clock in da Bronx."

>Oscar looked back at Weasel and nodded. "Ise'll be dere Uncle Wiese."<br>Weasel licked his pen. "How many?"

>Shuffles passed him two bits. "Only fifty today."<br>"Fifty papes!" Morris didn't look up as he handed Shuffles her papers.

>Oscar handed his uncle Ditz's money. Weasel barely glanced at the

money. "Fourty papes foh yer bruddah." <br>Shuffles hefted her papers under her good arm and turned to go. Behind her she could hear newsies complaining as Dice, Hearts, Quips and Flicks cut the line to buy their papers. Shuffles paused at the head of the stairs and looked down at Jack. She sighed.

>"Well aint dis a familiah scene. Whatta ya want dis time Cowboy?"<br>Jack's eyes flickered from hers, to Oscar who stood slightly to the side of Shuffles in support.  
>He scowled slightly, but looked back at Shuffles. He glanced at her arm. "Youse a'ight?"<br>"Course Ise am... no thanks to youse guys." Her gaze flickered to Race and Mush coldly, and the two shrank back.

>Jack shook his hair back from his eyes. "So whys you back in Manhattan dis mornin' Shuffles?"<br>Shuffles sighed and rolled her eyes. "Come on Cowboy, aint you got any oddah lines? Heah, we'll play da game. Harlem declared war on Manhattan, dis would be me an' me newsies movin' in on youh turf," she said slowly.

>The Harlem newsies snickered, and Shuffles saw one or two of the Manhattan newsies cover their smiles with coughs.<br>Jack glared up at Shuffles. "Youse in trouble Shuffles. Youse aint jist against us no more."

>"Ah yes.. as Ise found out last night." <br>Jack shifted uncomfortably. "Well yeah." He looked up at her curiously. "Who did dat to yas anyways?"

>"Who?... Who di.? WHO?" Shuffles glanced back over her shoulder at Quips. "Quips did he jist say what I t'ink he said?"<br>Quips nodded, smirking at Cowboy. "Yep."

>Shuffles shook her head in mock shock. "Who did dis to me? Well I'll be..." She rolled her eyes. "Go ask yer friends in da Bowery Cowboy."<br>"Ise knew it was Vipah," Race muttered under his breath. Jack caught him with a light elbow to the ribs.

>"Shuffles its jist youse versus me, Scah an' Diamond. Back off, 'n call off dis wah."<br>She shook her head. "Cant do dat Jacky-boy." She walked down the last few steps and stared up at Jack. For a moment she wished that Jack didn't dwarf her by more than half a foot, but brushed the thought away. Her blue eyes were cold, and she tossed her blond hair back. "Taday youh territory dropped by t'ree blocks. Tamorrow it'll drop again, till youse is gone and Harlem has dis territory." She turned to her newsies. "Harlem, go."

>Dice, Quips, and Hearts obediently left. Flicks followed them to the gate, then stopped and waited for Shuffles. <br>Shuffles and Oscar were walking to the gates when Shuffles was grabbed by her good arm and spun around. Thinking it was Jack, Shuffles was surprised when she came face to face with her brother.

>Kid Blink stared at his sister, who gazed back at him with cool eyes. "What da hell is goin' on Shuffles? Why's youse doin dis?"<br>Shuffles yanked her arm back from the tight grip of her brother. "Ise doin dis cuz Manhattan took me territory an' Ise want it back." She turned back to Oscar, who was watching the confrontation between the two siblings. As was most of the circulation center, though only a few knew of Blink and Shuffles's relationship.

>"Come on Oscah..." She headed towards the gate.<br>Blink glared after her. "Juliet Rose O'Riely!"

>Shuffles turned around, her face perfectly calm but her eyes furious. "I know dat youse did not jist call me..."<br>"Oh yes I did!" Blink interrupted her. "Listen Juliet youse can't keep dis up foh no reason! Youse already got hoit. What happens when one of youh newsies gets hoit? Or killed? Do ya t'ink youse kin git t'rough dat again?" He ignored the pain that crossed his sister's face. "Da

Bowery don't play faih, an' youse know it."

>Shuffles glared at him, and her words were like ice. "Den youse shouldn't have brought dem into dis. An' if any of me newsies die, Ise'll hold Manhattan responsible."<br>Murmerings broke up around the crowd. Both siblings shot the assembled newsies glares, and they quieted. Shuffles stepped up to Blink. "One more t'ing dere Mistah Joshua Trey O'Riely. If youse evah, evah call me Juliet again, I'll soak youse so bad dat you wont walk foh a week."

>Blink glared at his sister, ignoring the startled comments of the newsies as they discovered Blink and Shuffles's relationship. "Is dat a t'reat Juliet?"<br>Shuffles narrowed her eyes at him. "Its a promise."

>She turned and walked out of the circulation center, taking her papers from Oscar as the two of them headed north. Blink glared after her briefly, before grabbing his papers and heading south, angrier than any newsie had ever seen him.<br>

>Oscar walked aimlessly down the streets of Manhattan, selling his papers as he went. Shuffles was less than a block behind him, selling her papers and snitching the random extra cent if the customers were rude. <br>Oscar wasn't paying much attention to his surroundings, so he was surprised when he was suddenly pushed into an alley.

>"Ey! Whats da idea?" He spun around, to glare at his assailants.<br>Pie Eater and Bumlets stood blocking the entrance to the alley. Oscar eyed the staff in Bumlet's hands before shifting his gaze to Pie Eater.

>"Well well..." Pie Eater said. "What do wese got heah? A Delancy sellin' da Woild? Ise shocked..."<br>Oscar belatedly remembered that Pie and Bumlets hadn't been at the Circulation Center that morning, when the Harlem newsies had bought their papers. "Look guys," he sighed. He really wasnt in the mood to fight with anyone. "Will ya jist let mes go?" He attempted to push past them.

>Pie Eater pushed Oscar back, farther into the alley. "Whats wrong Oscah? Not so big wit'out Morris around?"<br>Oscar rolled his eyes. "Oh dat really hoits Pie Eatah... Ise coulda sworn dat youse was smartah den to use a line like dat. Can't believe Ise been wrong all dis time." He attempted to push past again, but instead was met by Pie Eater's fist in his stomach. He bent double, gasping for air. He winced and collapsed to the ground as an elbow came down between his shoulder blades.

>"Git offa him!!!" Shuffles's voice rang down the alley way. She ran up, pushing a surprised Pie Eater off of Oscar. She quickly knelt next to him. "Oscah, are youse okay?"<br>Oscar groaned, but managed to sit up. "Ise a'ight..." Shuffles helped him to his feet with her good arm.

>Shuffles's cold eyes caught Pie Eater's. "Oscah, " she said, not looking away, "whys dont youse head back towards da lodgin' house kay? Meet up wit Flicks on youh way back ta Harlem."<br>Oscar went to protest, but something in Shuffles's tone stopped him. He gathered up the rest of their papers and headed out of the alley, pushing past Bumlets, who stood to one side, fidgetting.

>Cold green eyes met dark coffee eyes across the alleyway. The two teenagers were silent, each observing the other, while remembering the history that had caused the ever-present conflict.<br>Pie Eater took a deep breath, letting it out as he stared at Shuffles. When she didn't move, he stepped forward, intending to go around her. But he was stopped short by the knife that materialized in her good hand. He quickly stepped back, searching his mind for something to say.

>"What happened ta ya?" He asked, nodding at her sling.<br>"Vipah paid me a visit." Her voice was emotionless, monotone.

>His eyes flicked to the knife in her hand. "I t'ought dat Harlem was taught ta not carry weapons?"<br>Her eyes flashed with remembered pain. "I was taught in Brooklyn. 'Member?"

>Inwardly he winced, how could he have brought that up? "Uh, yeah." He sighed. "Look Jules... Ise sorry!" <br>"Save it Craig. An' don't call me Jules!" Her tone was rough, yet mundane.

>"Well well, what do we have heah?" Spot's voice came from behind Pie Eater. He whirled around just as Spot stepped out of the shadows, cane in hand.<br>Pie Eater immedietly tensed, trapped between the two people who disliked him, maybe hated him, the most in New York. Though there were quite a few people in Chicago...

>Pie Eater snapped himself out of his wandering thoughts. That was exactly what got him into this situation in the first place. He raised his eyes to meet Spot's.<br>Spot slid his gaze from Pie Eater to Shuffles. Pie Eater raised an eyebrow at the concern that flashed in Spot's eyes. Spot moved his gaze back to Pie without a word.

>"Bumlets, whys don't youse git outta heah?"<br>Bumlets, who had been watching the scene with apprehension near the entranceway, shifted his eyes to meet Pie Eater's. "Spot Ise don really..."

>"Ise said.. git."<br>This time Pie Eater gulped. But he shook his head at Bumlets. "Go ahead... Ise'll meet ya at Tibby's."

>Bumlets nodded, turning the corner and disappearing from view.<br>"So..." Spot turned his eyes back at Pie Eater, raking over him with thinly disguised hatred. "What was goin' on heah?"

>Pie Eater glanced around nervously. "Ain't nuttin goin on Spot... I'se jist goin' ta sell me papes..." He started edging backwards.<br>He didn't get very far. He froze at the sight of Shuffles moving off to the side of him. It took him a moment to realize she had put her blade away. He judged the distance between himself and Spot, and decided to take a chance.

>"Hey uh Spot... Ise jist wanna say dat Ise really sorry... youse know dat I am..." Pie Eater probably would have continued but he was cut off by Spot tackling him into the alley wall. Pie Eater couldn't fight back as Spot beat on him, anger and hurt shining in his eyes.<br>"Git off of him Conlon! Cripes..." Pie Eater could suddenly breathe again, as Spot rolled off of him and up to his feet. Pie Eater blinked his eyes, trying to stay conscious. Hazily, he made out what Shuffles and Spot were arguing about.

>"Why da hell did ya tell me ta git off of him Shuffles? He desoived it!"<br>"You was gonna kill 'im Conlon! Aint nobody desoives dat!"

>"I wasn't gonna kill 'im!"<br>"Spot youse was gone! If I hadn't stopped ya he'd be dead! Is dat what youse want? Cripes youse keep gettin me in more trouble!"

>Pie Eater roughly pulled himself to his feet, and walked unsteadily in the direction of Tibby's. Neither Shuffles nor Spot noticed his disappearance. Shuffles continued to yell at Spot.<br>"Foist youse have me start a war wit Cowboy! Fine, dat Ise kin live wit. But now Ise got da Bowery boys beatin' me, and t'reaten me!"

>Spot's eyes softened. It surprised Shuffles so much, that she stopped shouting. "Did dey hoit ya real bad Shuff?"<br>Shuffles shook her head. "Nah, ise'll survive. Only bruised ribs, an' a sprained wrist. Dis sling'll be off by tonight."

>Spot nodded. "Dats good." His face returned to its normal expressionless mask. "Bullet said dat youse wanted ta talk wit me."<br>Shuffles rolled her eyes at the abrupt subject change, but didn't argue it. "Yeah. Look, Cowboy has Scah an' Diamond backin' him in dis fight. Harlem cant make it alone. We'se started dis war for youse. Now we want yer support."

>Spot frowned. "Youse already got our support."<br>"No. Ise want it announced dat Brooklyn is backin' Harlem. If youse back us, den da rest of da city will stick wit us too."

>"Cept foh West Side. Dublin loves ta stay neutral in territory wars..." Spot sounded exasperated.<br>Shuffles smirked. "'e jist likes ta watch da rest of us fight 'mongst ourselves."

>Spot sighed. He met Shuffles eyes. For a moment he gazed at them, contemplating how much they were like his own. Cold and expressionless, hiding every emotion; eyes that shown with more pain and knowledge than any teenager ought to have. He nodded.

<br>~~~~~

>Pie Eater stumbled into Tibby's. The newsies that were already there all jumped to their feet in alarm at the sight of him. His left eye was bruised and he was bleeding from a cut on his forehead. His shirt was caked with dirt and it was torn on the back of his shoulder. Pie Eater also wasn't very steady on his feet.<br>Immediately Pie was set at a table with Bumlets, Dutchy, Swifty and Specs. Swifty handed him a napkin to hold to the cut on his forehead. Bumlets was in distress; smoking a cigarette and he kept apologizing to Pie Eater for leaving him. The only problem was that Bumlets kept switching back and forth between English and Spanish. No one could understand him, except Tumbles, and the kid wasn't paying any attention.

>Finally Dutchy elbowed Bumlets and he shut up. Pie Eater allowed Specs to bandage his cut with supplies from the resturant before talking. <br>"Bumlets and Ise was sellin' our papes an' we ran into Oscah. He had papes an' was sellin' 'em so Bum and I decided ta rough 'em up a lil."

>At this most of the guys groaned. Bumlets and Pie Eater both looked up in surprise. "Wha?"<br>Specs shook his head. "Oscah showed up dis mornin' wit Shuffles. Seems like he stayed in Harlem last night, an' is sellin' papes foh one of da goils up dere."

>Pie Eater sighed. "Dat 'xplains so much. Shuffles showed up, an' pulled me off Oscah. She sent him back ta Harlem... Ise was tryin' ta go when Spot showed up."<br>Startled murmurings started up around the room. Jack quickly shoved his way through the crowd. "Spot's in Manhattan?"

>Pie Eater nodded. "Uh yeah... when Ise left, him an' Shuffles was arguin..."<br>Jack looked almost relieved. "What about?"

>Pie Eater reddened and looked down. "Uh.. 'sbout Spot soakin' me."<br>A few of the guys winced involuntarily, like they were reliving their own experiences at Spot's fists. Jack snapped his fingers.

>"If Spot and Shuffles are fighten' den maybe he won't help her 'gainst us."<br>Race rolled his eyes. "Da fact dat Spot an' Shuffles are talkin' again, even if it is fightin', should be considered more den whedda he's gonna help her or not in dis war," he muttered. Everyone ignored him, however Blink looked like he agreed with Race.

>Pie Eater shook his head, in answer to Jack's statement. "Nah.. Ise saw his eyes. He was real worried 'bout her when he saw her... Vipah really did a numbah on her."<br>A few of the guys nodded in agreement. Others were beginning to drift away, going back to their interrupted lunches.

>Jack sat back down at the table he was sharing with Blink, Race, Crutchy and Mush. He began picking at his food. Crutchy and Blink exchanged a glance.<br>"Hey uh, Jack?"

>He looked up at Crutchy. "Yeah?"<br>"Hows come we'se just don't give 'em da turf we'se took from 'em? Dat ways, da fights ovah."

>Jack glared at the three around the table. "Do youse all t'ink like dat?"<br>Race and Mush looked down at their hands. "We'se din mean ta

git Shuffles dat hoit Jack... We din't even know dat Vipah would go aftah her... 'Sides.. none of us really wanna fight her... She's like our sistah."

>Blink took a sip of his rum and coke. "Some more den oddahs..." he muttered.<br>Crutchy glanced at his drink. "It aint even noon Blink..."

>Blink glared at him out of his right eye. Crutchy held up his hands to show he was backing off.<br>Race sighed. "Da t'ing is Jack... almost none of da guys wanna fight wit Shuffles. We'se all lived wit her for almost foh yeahs... she's family. None of us could hoit her..."

>Jack slammed his fist down on the table. "Look. Maybe youse don't wanna fight wit her. Dats understandable. But she's da one dat started dis fight, an' Ise aint gonna let Manhattan back down from it. Aint nobody gonna get awful hoit."<br>Race and Mush exchanged glances but nodded grudgingly. Both looked at Blink, "the third musketeer". He stared at his rum and coke for a moment, before drinking the last of it in one shot. Grabbing his papers he stood up and headed out of Tibby's. He pushed past Snipeshooter and Snaps, who were entering, without a word.

>Snipeshooter went to find a seat with Boots and Les, while Snaps headed to Jack's table. He was sporting a bruise on his cheek, and a torn sleeve.<br>Crutchy looked up in surprise. "What happened ta you?"

>"Da bordah has been pushed back ta 122nd street. T'undah gave me hell when Ise tried ta go ta 125th."<br>Race cursed slightly under his breath. "T'ree blocks in a day. She's movin' fast."

>"She aint gonna beat us," Jack said. "She aint."<br>~~~~~

>Shuffles knocked on the door to the Harlem Lodging House. A few moments later Ditz opened the door. Shuffles stepped in. "ey Ditz"<br>"Hey Shuffles. Youse da last one in today."

>Shuffles nodded, closing and locking the door behind her. "Did Oscah give you youh money yet?"<br>Ditz jingled the pocket of her skirt, so Shuffles could hear the coins. "Yeah, he came by eoliah. Said he had ta go ta dinnah wit 'is uncle."

>"Dat's right... he'll be heah latah. Hey, youse comin' ta da game tonight?"<br>Ditz nodded. "Aye... Ise don't tink I'll play dough. Not dat good."

>Shuffles headed up the stairs, taking her sling off as she did. The newsies were all lounging about in the bunkroom, killing time before the poker game. Doc came over to her when she entered.<br>"Youse should prolly leave dat on..."

>Shuffles shrugged. "Ise fine."<br>Doc sighed and nodded. "Hows da ribs?"

>Shuffles shifted her upper torso. "Dey feel a'ight. Not dat much pain."<br>"Good. Head?"

>"'S been fine since I ate today."<br>"Good. What time we'se leavin' foh da Bronx?"

>"Da game aint till ten. So prolly 'bout eight." <br>Doc groaned. "We'se got anudda houh?" She sighed dramatically, collapsing on to her bunk.

>Shuffles rolled her eyes. She walked over to her bunk and grabbed her brush. Using a piece of string, she quickly twisted her hair up off her neck.<br>She turned, and stopped immedietly. She walked over to the far bunk, where Dice and Bolt were playing cards. She sighed when she saw the beaten form of Quips in the bed.

>"What happened ta him?" She asked.<br>"Ice an' Diamond happened. He was sellin' down at Ellis Isle an' dey jumped 'im."

>Shuffles swore. "Why da hell was he down so fah?"<br>Dice shrugged.

"Hearts was wit 'im. Ise guess dey t'ought dey'd be okay tagedda."

>"Where's Hearts?" Worry was creeping into her voice.<br>"Dat goil's aight." Dice laughed. "Lil' spitfire. Ise hoid dat she gave Diamond a black eye befoh he knocked her out. She jist gets a few cuts and bruises. Nuttin' serious. She's asleep ovah in her bunk. Still wants ta go to da game."

>Shuffles smiled, although no one noticed the sadness to it. "Good foh her. First fight as a newsie."<br>Dice grinned. "Yep. Got off pretty well too. Right proud of her."

>Shuffles's smile dimmed as she knelt by Quip's bed. "Is he okay?"<br>Dice nodded. "Doc checked 'im out. Bruises everywhere... cuts an' scratches. Doc had ta stich up 'is side. Hearts said dat dey pulled a blade on 'em."

>"But he'll be okay?"<br>"Yeah... he's jist gotta rest foh a few days... close ta a week."

>Shuffles grinned weakly. "Da poor kid... e'll hate dat."<br>Dice nodded. "Yeah. Someone'll have ta sell his papes foh 'im." Dice looked slyly at her. "Perhaps Oscah would ablige?"

>Shuffles rolled her eyes and smiled. "Maybe... Morris may have a problem wit dat."<br>"Oh dat stupid ape. Ise don't see how Oscah's related ta da bum."

>"Same faddah... Ise guess Oscah jist took aftah his muddah."<br>"Prollys. So. How are t'ings between you an' ouh favorite Delancy?"

>Shuffles laughed. "Ain't none of youh business Dice."<br>"Aw come on! We'se need some new gossip 'round dis place!"

>Shuffles shook her head. "Nope." She brushed her hand across Quips's forehead. "Get bettah kid."<br>She stood, and rolled her eyes at Dice's pleas for details. Moving into the center of the room, she pushed Flicks off of his chair. She climbed up on it. "'Ey! Harlem listen up!"

>When she had everyone's attention she continued. "Who's on da bordahs right now?"<br>"Nail, Carrot, an' Flute," Rumor informed her.

>"An' whose on lobby duty?"<br>"Quips was... Ise guess I'll do it," Two-bit shrugged.

>"Youse okay wit dat?" She asked him. He nodded. "A'ight... now whose not goin' ta da game."<br>No one raised their hand. Shuffles sighed. "Fine... Two-bit youse make shoah dat all da windows and doors are locked. An' make shoah dat youse check up on Quips a few times kay?"

>The young newsie nodded. Shuffles ruffled his hair and smiled at him. "Okay Harlem... It's bout seven thoity, so if youse wanna start ta da Bronx, go ahead. Shadow youse take 'em... you 'member how ta git ta BJ's right?"<br>Whooping and hollering, the newsies headed out of the Lodging House and north towards the bridge that would take them into the Bronx.

>Shuffles helped Two-bit lock the windows and back door before he settled into the lobby chair for his watch. Shuffles took one glance at Quips before heading out of the lodging house, closing and locking the door behind her. She sat down on the steps to wait for Oscar.<br>

>He showed up nearly twenty minutes later. Oscar sat down next to Shuffles on the steps. He took one last drag on his cigarette before handing it to Shuffles. She sighed before taking it.<br>"What's wrong Shuff?"

>She sighed again, throwing the cigarette to the ground. "Nothin' an' everything."<br>Oscar leaned back on his elbows and looked sideways at her. "Wha happened?"

>"Where would ya like me ta start?"<br>Oscar raised an eyebrow. "Um.. how 'bout what happened wit Pie Eatah?"  
>"Well, Spot showed up. An' he told Bumlets ta go away an' den Pie Eatah tried ta apolagize an' Spot started soakin' him an he was gonna kill 'im! But Ise pulled 'im off, an' we was arguin. Ise told 'em dat he had ta officially support Harlem in dis. He seemed fine wit it, but Ise dunno if he'll go t'rough wit it. An' den Ise come back ta da house, an' I find dat Quips was soaked today."<br>Oscar sat up in alarm. "Is he okay? Wha happened?"  
>"Quips an Hearts got jumped down by Ellis Isle. Ice an' Diamond."<br>"Who?" Oscar looked at Shuffles confused.  
>"Dats right, youse dunno dem. Diamond is da leadah of Midtown. An' Ice is one of da newsies der."<br>"Well? Is da kid a'ight?"  
>"Yeah. Quips is up in da bunkroom. Stuck on bedrest foh a week. Hearts got off fine." Shuffles smiled slightly. "Gave Diamond a black eye, befohe he knocked her out."<br>"Den where's your problem Shuff?"

>She sighed, resting her head against his shoulder as Oscar put his arm around her. "Dis war... it was supposed ta be small, ya know? Not even a war.. jist a small territory dispute. A few lil' soakin's here an' dere... Harlem would extend da territory ta da bridge... Brooklyn backin' in da shadows. Wouldn't be dat hard, right? But now da Bowery an' Midtown are involved... Ise can't let me kids go up 'gainst dem alone. So now Brooklyn officially joins up. An' Queens and da Bronx. We'se got a full out city war goin' on... someones gonna get really hoit... or killed. An' Ise cant deal wit dat again."<br>Oscar hugged her close. "Relax Jules..." he said. "Harlem's strong, dey'll survive. An' you made 'em like dis. Remember when youse foist came? Harlem was lil', strugglin' an' disorganized. But youse came heah... made friends quick an' fixed it up. Youse got da Lodgin' House foh us... ya organized 'em an' youse taught us ta fight. Harlem aint so lil' no more. Dey strong, an' we'se got allies. Cuz of you. Aint nobody gonna git killed... we'se gonna all look out foh each uddah."

>Shuffles smiled slightly. "T'anks Oscah... I t'ink Ise needed ta heah dat."<br>Oscar kissed her forehead. "Youse welcome me goil."

>The two were silent, suddenly aware of their closeness. Oscar's eyes dropped to Shuffles's lips as he lowered his head. And without Quips to interrupt them, Oscar's lips touched Shuffles's in a soft kiss.<br>~~~~~

>Spot leaned back in his chair, hat pulled low over his eyes as he stared at his cards. It had been thirty minutes since Harlem had shown up at the poker game. They were well into the second hand of the games, and Shuffles had still not arrived. Dice had told him that she had stayed at the Lodging House to wait for a friend. The fact that she wouldn't say who had sparked Spot's bad mood, and now most of the newsies were avoiding him, moreso than usual.<br>"Ise raise ya five..."

>The poker game was interrupted as everyone looked up to see who was entering the hall. There was a small commotion by the door, and good natured laughing could be heard. Then there was a shout, more laughter, and the crowd of newsies gave way for the small Harlem leader. <br>The three leaders, Spot, Phoenix and Spade, all stood. They made their way over to Shuffles. The newsies quieted. No one noticed as Oscar pushed his way to the circle; all eyes were on the four leaders.

>Phoenix, named for his ability to come back stronger from any scrape (not to mention his flaming red hair and orange-gold eyes) broke into a grin. "Shuffles, tis been awhile lass."<br>She smiled. "So it has

Phoenix." They spitshook. "Ise missed ya."

>"Queens missed ya too. Youse got ta come around moh."<br>Shuffles shrugged, as the circle around them broke up; the newsies going back to their cards. "Harlem's been keepin' me busy, ya know how tis."

>Spade nodded, accepting the lie for what it was. "Aye, we know." The young black newsie grinned as he hugged Shuffles. They knew each other well. "How's dat islan' been treatin ya? We'se got some news of da trouble goin' down."<br>Shuffles shrugged. "A lil' dispute wit da Manhattan gang... dey been stealin' my turf."

>Phoenix opened his mouth to ask a question, but was interrupted by the appearance of a young black man, probably early twenties. The man grinned as he recognized Shuffles, and swept her up into a hug.

"How's my Jules? I haven't seen you in a long time!"<br>Shuffles struggles to hide the pain in her ribs the hug had caused her. "BJ! It has been a long time. Ise been doin' a'ight."

>Spot snorted softly, and only Shuffles heard him. She shot him a glare and he held up his hands in surrender. However, BJ had noticed the bandages on her arm. <br>"What is this, me girl? Who've you been fighting with now?"

>Oscar spoke up from behind her, making his presence known. "Only most of Manhattan Isle..."<br>BJ raised an eyebrow at Oscar's comment, as Shuffles rolled her eyes. Both Phoenix and Spade lit up at the sight of him; however, Spot's eyes grew stormy and hard.

>"Coin! We'se haven't seen youse since ya left Harlem foh da last time. How ya been lad? Da Woild treatin' ya right?"<br>Oscar exchanged spit shakes with the Bronx and Queens leaders. "Aye, tis been a long while. 'Ey, Ise git by. How's youse been? Ise was surprised ta hear dat youse landed da leadership job in da Bronx Spade."

>Spade grinned. "Yeah, ise got in a lot of trouble at foist. But BJ heah keeps an eye out foh da Bronx newsies, so he's a help."<br>Spot's eyes were still narrowed on Oscar. He could feel them, and was beginning to shift uncomfortably. A few of the Brooklyn newsies were murmuring amongst themselves, sensing the tension.

>Shuffles also noticed Oscar's uneasiness. She squeezed his hand reassuringly. "Relax Oscah..." she whispered. He turned slightly towards her, a ghost of a smile portraying his thanks.<br>Spot's eyes widened at the sight, and they flickered in the direction of Dice suspiciously. Her self-satisfied smirk answered his unspoken question.

>Phoenix cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Wells uh.. we'se gonna git back to da game?"<br>Spot shook his head. "Yeah yeah.. a'ight den. Ise do believe Ise was about ta win." His tone was arrogant and normal, although his eyes were flat, hiding the turmoil of emotions he felt.

>Shuffles smiled and she dropped Oscar's hand to join the leaders at the table. "'Ey deal me in..."<br>Cards, Spade's girl and a Bronx newsie, grinned at Shuffles as she sat down. She dealt five cards to her. "Shuffles, Ise haven't seen ya in awhile."

>"Yeah Ise been busy... give me t'ree."<br>Cards exchanged the three new cards for the ones Shuffles handed over, and listened as Shuffles continued. "But Ise missed ya guys... I have ta git ovah to dis side of da rivah more often."

>Spade grinned. "Ante's two pennies. An' ya should come visit us more often. Da newsies miss ya, an' Cards heah is always lookin' ta learn some more of dem tricks youse know, fer shuffling."<br>Shuffles dropped her two cents on the small pile. "Yeah? Ise t'ink youse

almost know all of dem Cards, I havent learned no new ones."

>"Wasn't Race teachin' ya dem? He's got some great ones..."<br>Shuffles shrugged as she gazed at her cards. "'Eh... Manhattan an' I aint on da best of terms right now, ya know? So Ise havent loined nothin' new from Race lately."

>Spade frowned as he matched Spot's bet of five cents. "What's been goin' on wit dat Island? Shoih we know dere's trouble, but how bad is it?" He eyed her bandages. "An' who soaked ya?"<br>Spot answered for her. "Jack's been takin' ovah da Harlem territory lately. He's spreadin his boys out from Midtown ta past Central Park. He's runnin' da whole of da middle of the Isle."

>"Cept for da West Side." Shuffles smirked. "Dublin won't let any of da Manhattan boys cross da bordah into his turf."<br>Phoenix dropped two bits on to the pile. "He's smart. Jack's been gettin' pretty full of 'imself since da strike. Cowboy's prolly goin foh da whole northern half of da island."

>Shuffles's eyes flashed with suppressed anger. "He ain't gettin' Harlem. Me newsies an' I are fightin' him wit everyt'ing we'se got. But he's got Midtown an' da Bowery helpin' him."<br>BJ, who had left the group for a few moments, came back carrying a drink just in time to hear Shuffles's comment. His eyes widened in surprise. "Jack's working with the Bowery gang?" BJ's voice grew cold. "The two turf's never got along, even back before I was the leader. Why is he working with them now?"

>"Mush is from da Bowery. His oldah bruddah used ta be in dat gang, till he got killed. Dat's why Mush moved ta Manhattan; he don't fit in wit dat gang. But dey still look out foh him, so when Mush told dem dat Harlem was fightin' wit da Downtown Manhattan gang... dey decided ta 'help 'im out', so ta speak." Shuffles explained. She glanced at her cards and raised the bet by two nickles.<br>BJ glanced at her hand, and managed to keep his face expressionless. He glanced at Spade as the young man whistled. "So its you voises Cowboy, Diamond an' Scah?"

>Spot dropped more money on to the growing pile. "Meet an' raise ya anuddah ten cents." He exchanged a glance with Shuffles. Her eyes were challenging; she obviously didn't believe that he would stand behind her, and announce Brooklyn's support. He allowed himself to smirk a little. "Brooklyn is helpin' out Harlem. We'se been helpin' dem extend dere bordah back south, an' east." He smiled inwardly as Shuffles's eyes widened in surprise and gratitude.<br>Spade and Phoenix looked surprised. While Harlem and Brooklyn didn't fight, they weren't the best of allies. In fact, the two territories barely had any contact with each other. It had always been like that, but even more so since Shuffles and Spot had taken over leadership in Harlem and Brooklyn, respectfully. Every newsie in New York knew why Shuffles no longer interacted with Brooklyn, and both Spade and Phoenix secretly wondered what had suddenly changed.

>Spade cleared his throat as he glanced at his cards. "Ise meet da ten, an' raise by thoity cents."<br>Phoenix dropped his hand down. "Ise fold."

>Shuffles met Spade's bet. "...an' Ise raise ya anuddah twenty."<br>Spot folded his hand as well. Spade raised an eyebrow. "Guess its jist youse an' me, Shuff."

>She smirked. "Ise guess it is."<br>The betting continued silently. As other games finished up a hand, more newsies came to watch the two leaders play.

>Their gazes locked as Shuffles raised the bet by two-bits. Spade met her bet, and it raised again. Shuffles met the bet, a sly smile hovering on her lips. "Call."<br>Spade placed his cards down. "Full

House; queens over eights."

>Shuffles nodded. "Impressive." She smirked as she dropped her cards. "Straight flush, spades." She grinned at the look on the onlookers faces as she swept the pile into her pouch.<br>Spade leaned back in his chair, holding up his hand so that Cards wouldn't deal the next round. "Youse an' Spot cant fight dese guys by yerselves." His tone was serious.

>Shuffles fingered the bandage around her arm absently. She didn't say anything, simply kept her gaze locked with Spade's.<br>The young Bronx leader stood up. "BJ can we'se youse da safe room?"

>BJ nodded. "Yeah, dis way."<br>The four leaders followed BJ to the room at the back of the casino. Their newsies watched them from the corner of their eyes, all curious what their leaders were discussing.

>Spade dropped into his seat, as BJ closed the door behind them. Although he was the youngest and the newest of the leaders present, they were in his territory and he ran the meeting. "What do we'se git foh helpin' youse?"<br>Phoenix raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Aside from da obvious pleasure of knockin' Jacky-boy's ego down a few notches?"

>Shuffles shrugged. "Ise dunno what Ise kin offah youse, 'cept territory. But dat aint no good foh youse, since youse on da uddah side of da rivah.<br>Spade glanced at Spot, who was examining his slingshot. "What do youse git?"

>"Da Bridge," Spot answered shortly.<br>Phoenix nodded, impressed. "Youse must be goin' foh a lot of territory dere, Shuff."

>She nodded. "From our bordah right now, down ta Midtown's bordah, an' da Brooklyn bridge."<br>"Basically, youse want da East Side." Spade shortened.

>She shrugged carefully, ignoring the growing pain in her ribs.

"Yeah."<br>He sighed. "Since youse is right, an' ya don't have stuff ta offah us, I dunno what we'se git outta helpin' youse."

>Spot lifted his gaze to meet the younger leader's. "How about we'se say dat you'se help out Shuffles, an' Brooklyn won't invade da Bronx."<br>Spade gulped, and Shuffles inwardly laughed at his expression. "Ey, uh no need foh t'reats Spot. Ise was jist gonna say dat Shuff could owe us one.. ya know?"

>Phoenix laughed. "'ell I'll do it foh da fun of it. But a promise of futu'ah help would be nice Shuff."<br>She nodded. "Both da Bronx an' Queens have an' I.O.U. from Harlem, a'ight?"

>Spade nodded. "Aye, so its da fough of us, against Scah, Diamond an' Cowboy?"<br>Shuffles shifted her position. "Ise was talkin' wit Oscah, an' he said dat da Crib might give us a hand if we'se need it."

>"NO!" Spot exploded, before anyone else had a chance to comment.

"Ise refuse ta woik wit da Crib!"<br>"Spot wait..."

>"No! Ise can't believe youse even considah dat Shuffles! It goes 'gainst everyt'ing dat da newsies are!" <br>The two were shouting. Spade and Phoenix leaned back against the wall, listening to the argument. They knew it was useless to interfere.

>Back out in the casino, the newsies could hear the two leaders arguing. Dice smirked as she collected her winnings. "Ise t'ink dat Spot jist found out about youh offah, Oscah."<br>Oscar sighed, looking over at the closed door. "Ise t'ink dat youh right..."

>They both jumped as the door banged open, and Spot came storming out. Younger Brooklyn newsies jumped to their feet, only to be stopped by the older ones as Shuffles followed Spot out the door. Both Shuffles and Spot disappeared outside, slamming the door shut behind them.<br>Oscar winced. "T'ink Ise should go outside an' try ta

break it up?"

>Dice nodded. "Ise t'ink it would be a good idea... c'mon Ise'll go wit youse."<br>

>Shuffles followed Spot out into the deserted road. It was getting late, nearing midnight, and most people were in bed. Using her good arm, she grabbed Spot and whipped him around.<br>"We'se are not done talkin'! Now youse said dat you wanted Harlem ta fight youh battle wit Manhattan. If dats how its gonna be, den we're gonna play by Harlem rules!"

>Spot glared at her in complete anger. "Its da bloody CRIB! How's kin youse even t'ink about dis Shuffles? Its beyond common sense!"<br>"Osciah is a friend of da Harlem newsies! He's one of us, an' he wants ta help us out! Ise not gonna tell him he can't!"

>Spot spun around, exasperated. "Ise can't believe dis! Look da Delancys are trouble! Dere scabs, an' so is da Crib! We'se stay away from dem, an' dey stay away from us. Kin youse fergit what dey did to us durin' da strike so easily?"<br>"Osciah is not a scab! He's a newsie, at least he used ta be. Ise don' like da Crib anymore den youse do, Spot. Its one gang dat youse don't want ta git messed up wit. But Osciah offered dere help, if we'se need it. An' Ise aint gonna turn him down, if it comes ta that!"

>Spot sighed heavily. "Osciah... Ise don't like it, Shuffles. Dere's somethin' 'bout him dat rubs me da wrong way. I know dat he used ta be a newsie, but dats da t'ing. Used ta be. He aint no more, he left da newsies ta work foh da Woild. Ise don't want him 'round Harlem no mores."<br>Shuffles laughed. "Yer kiddin' right? Why da hell should Ise listen to youse? Osciah is my best friend! He has been since Chance died. He was there for me Conlon. Youse git dat? When Ise was in pain he was dere foh me! Unlike some of me uddah friends."

>Spot ran his hand through his hair. "Jesus Shuffles, can't ya jist listen ta me, foh once? Ise sorry I couldn't be dere foh ya, but I was hurtin' too! Damnit Ise had lost my bruddah!"<br>Shuffles glared at him, and stepped forward, poking him in the chest. "Damnit Conlon..."

>"Shuffs, wait..."<br>"... youse can't boss..."

>"... will ya let me..."<br>"...me around. What's yer..."

>"... explain? Ise jist wanna..."<br>"...problem wit Osciah..."

>"...damnit Shuffles!" Spot was tired of her not letting him explain. In truth, he couldn't explain it to himself, so why could he explain it to her? Instead of trying, Spot simply grabbed Shuffles gently by the arms and pulled her to him, in a kiss.<br>She was too stunned to react at first. Spot sighed inwardly, and started to pull away. However Shuffles wrapped her arm around his neck, deepening the kiss.

>"Holy..!" Dice and Oscar stepped out of BJ's casino, just in time to see Spot and Shuffles kissing. Dice stood there in shock, as did Oscar. <br>He blinked, but they were still there, kissing in front of him. Oscar turned and ran down the street, heading in the direction on Manhattan.

>Shuffles pulled away from Spot, in time to see Oscar running down the street. "Osciah..." She glanced back at Spot in a split moment of hesitation, before running after Oscar.<br>Dice walked forward, stopping in front of Spot. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Good job Conlon."

>Spot, who had been looking after Shuffles, turned to look at Dice. He smirked slightly.<br>Dice glared at him. "Have youse any idea what youse jist did?"

>Spot raised his eyebrow at her. "Ise kissed Shuffles."<br>"While

she's goin' out wit' Oscah!"

>He smirked again. "She kissed me back."<br>Dice rolled her eyes.

"She chased aftah Oscah, if youse didn't notice."

>He smiled slightly, walking back towards the casino. "But she hesitated."<br>

End

file.